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Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments

**UNCOVERING CHINA'S  
INFLUENCE IN EUROPE:  
HOW FRIENDSHIP GROUPS  
COOPT EUROPEAN ELITES**



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**Cover:** Xi Jinping attends a March 2019 ceremony in Rome for the signing of a memorandum of understanding between the Italian and Chinese governments on the Belt and Road Initiative. Alessia Pierdomenico / Shutterstock.com.

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# Executive Summary

Europe has emerged as a key battleground in the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP's) global campaign for political influence. This study adds to the budding literature on CCP influence in Europe by focusing narrowly on one element of the Party's multifaceted worldwide campaign: the role of friendship groups. "China friendship groups" vary in composition and mission. In general, they are associations comprising political, business, and other elites within a defined foreign territory that seek to promote closer bilateral relations with China.

This report contends that friendship associations are front organizations, entities tied to the Party via both direct and indirect channels. These fronts act as mouthpieces and intermediaries for advancing China's domestic priorities and foreign policy goals. They rely on coopted elites drawn from Europe's political class and business community to lead and to fill their ranks. The friendship groups are often disguised as homegrown organizations run by the host countries' own citizens, including former and active politicians.

This study finds that the coopted foreigners, who enjoy influence, convening power, and connections, serve the CCP's aims in several ways, subtle and otherwise. Cooptees parrot the Party's talking points, deflect narratives harmful to Beijing's image, host public events that showcase the Party's virtues, promote trade and investment, encourage technology transfers, and voice support for changes in European policies favorable to China.

The report provides three short case studies on the EU-China Friendship Group, the Italy-China Friendship Association, and the Czech-China Chamber of Collaboration. The case studies show there has been no shortage of willing partners to lead and join the friendship groups. The leaders of all three groups have clearly spoken and acted in ways that serve the Party's designs and that are at odds with European values and interests. They have supported Europe's deeper engagement with China in areas that could pose security risks and have promoted the Belt and Road Initiative.

The friendship groups' value to the CCP likely hinges on the influence campaign's place in the Party's larger regional and global strategy. The ubiquity of these associations across major powers and peripheral states in Europe suggests multiple possibilities. Beijing may be seeking to win over as many European governments as possible. Alternatively, the CCP

may be pursuing an indirect approach to erode Europe's collective will. By gradually peeling off weaker and smaller European states the Party could be seeking to fracture European consensus. At the same time, the Party values the smaller countries for their collective weight in multilateral forums.

European authorities and civil society are in a good position to implement measured approaches and policies to better understand, monitor, and push back against friendship associations. Europe's many topflight academic and research institutions should promote rigorous, deep studies on Chinese influence operations that draw on primary sources. European politicians should establish bureaucratic reporting mechanisms and processes that serve as public government records of CCP influence efforts. European governments and European Union (EU) institutions need to enact, where necessary, rules and regulations that enhance accountability and transparency.

European civil society organizations and businesses should pool resources and share information by forming multi-national networks or working groups that support research and analysis in political, economic, and social areas within which China is attempting to exert influence. Finally, Europe should draw strength from the formal and informal networks that it enjoys with many democratic governments that face similar challenges from the CCP.

The inferences drawn from this research are preliminary in character. Wider regional coverage and, particularly, more in-depth studies that rigorously measure effectiveness, would enhance understanding of the friendship associations' impact. Cross-country comparisons might yield insights about the CCP's strategy, priority targets, and modes of operation. Such findings would help policymakers identify vulnerable or stressed communities in Europe, enabling decisionmakers to allocate attention and resources accordingly.

## CHAPTER 1

# Introduction

Europe has emerged as a key battleground in the Chinese Communist Party's global campaign for political influence. In recent years, the communist regime has adroitly cultivated ties with European political parties, political elites, academia, media, and the private sector, enhancing its presence and sway across major institutions. Like other Western countries, such as Australia, that became unduly exposed to Chinese Communist Party (CCP or Party) influence, European governments and their wider publics are starting to catch on.<sup>1</sup> Media reports and an emerging body of research in the West have begun to expose the CCP's influence operations and their political challenge to European liberal democracies.<sup>2</sup> There is now wider recognition that Beijing has its sights on Europe and that the Party has made worrisome inroads into European state and society.

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- 1 This study recognizes that precise terminology matters. There are clear differences between the Chinese Communist Party, the Chinese state institutions that operate separately from or in parallel with the Party apparatus, the Chinese military, and Chinese society. These entities should not be conflated with each other. But, as this report shows, it is frequently difficult to disentangle these distinct, though organically related, actors. This study contends that the party-state-military apparatus engages in influence operations. Given the primacy of the CCP, this study refers to the Chinese Communist Party as the primary subject of analysis. On occasion, this study will use PRC, Beijing, China, the communist regime, and so forth as a stylistic shorthand for the CCP to avoid repetition in the prose. We thank Max Ernst for suggesting clarity on terminology.
  - 2 For a sampling of reports and analysis on CCP influence, see Thorsten Benner, Jan Gaspers, Mareike Ohlberg, Lucrezia Poggetti, and Kristin Shi-Kupfer, *Authoritarian Advance: Responding to China's Growing Political Influence in Europe* (Berlin: Global Public Policy Institute; Berlin: Mercator Institute for China Studies, 2018); *Sharp Power: Rising Authoritarian Influence* (Washington, DC: National Endowment for Democracy, 2017); Gerry Groot, "The CCP's Grand United Front abroad," *Sinopsis*, September 24, 2019, available at <https://sinopsis.cz/en/the-ccps-grand-united-front-abroad/>; François Godement and Abigaël Vasselier, *China at the gates: A new power audit of EU-China Relations* (London: European Council on Foreign Relations, 2017); "Hungarian Social Network Analysis," *Chinfluence*, available at <https://www.chinfluence.eu/hungarian-social-network-analysis/>; David Barboza, Marc Santora, and Alexandra Stevenson, "China Seeks Influence in Europe, One Business Deal at a Time," *The New York Times*, August 12, 2018, available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/12/business/china-influence-europe-czech-republic.html>; and Lukáš Valášek and Jan Horák, "Home Credit of wealthiest Czech Petr Kellner has paid for a campaign promoting China," *Aktuálně.cz*, December 11, 2020, accessed at <https://zpravy.aktualne.cz/domaci/home-credit-ppf-petr-kellner-campaign-china/r~265579361bf511ea926e0cc47ab5f122/>.

This study adds to the budding literature on CCP influence in Europe by focusing narrowly on one element of the Party's multifaceted worldwide campaign: the role of friendship groups.<sup>3</sup> "China friendship groups"<sup>4</sup> vary in composition and mission. In general, they are associations comprising political, business, and other elites within a defined foreign territory<sup>5</sup> that seek to promote closer bilateral relations with China. These ostensible civil society organizations help to facilitate educational and cultural exchanges and to promote collaboration between the People's Republic of China (PRC) and its various European counterparts on a wide range of topics of mutual interest. However, a closer examination suggests that these groups are not merely outgrowths of amity and goodwill within European civil society. Rather, these groups act as proxies that the CCP has actively cultivated to extend and deepen the Party's influence in Europe. Policymakers and analysts need to subject friendship groups to systematic study to understand their purpose, methods, and effectiveness in spreading the Party's influence and to determine how Europe's democracies can protect their values and institutions.

To gain analytical purchase on the phenomenon of friendship associations, this report is divided into four parts. First, it provides a primer on the united front—one of China's main conceptual and bureaucratic vehicles for influencing foreign audiences—and then maps the friendship groups onto the united front framework. Second, the study examines the evidence available about the friendship groups operating in the European Parliament, Italy, and the Czech Republic. Third, it assesses the relative effectiveness of the associations in advancing the Party's aims. Finally, the report offers policy recommendations for combating Chinese influence in Europe.

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3 For pathbreaking original studies on this phenomenon in Europe, see Didi Kirsten Tatlow, "Mapping China-in-Germany," *Sinopsis*, October 2, 2019, available at <https://sinopsis.cz/en/mapping-china-in-germany/> and Jichang Lulu, "Repurposing Democracy: The European Parliament China Friendship Cluster," *Sinopsis*, November 26, 2019, available at <https://sinopsis.cz/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/ep.pdf>.

4 This study uses the terms "friendship group" and "friendship association" interchangeably in reference to Europe-based organizations that use "group," "association," or "chamber" in their English-language names. This rule applies throughout the text except when these terms are used as proper nouns in the names of specific organizations.

5 China friendship groups in Europe exist at the supranational, national, and local levels.

## CHAPTER 2

# Friendship Groups as Conduits of Influence

### Why Friendship Groups Matter

This report contends that friendship associations are front organizations, entities tied to the Party via both direct and indirect channels.<sup>6</sup> These fronts act as mouthpieces and intermediaries for advancing China's domestic priorities and foreign policy goals. They rely on coopted elites drawn from Europe's political class and business community to lead and to fill their ranks. The friendship groups are often disguised as homegrown organizations run by the host countries' own citizens, including former and active politicians. This study finds that the coopted foreigners, who enjoy influence, convening power, and connections, serve the CCP's aims in a variety of ways, subtle and otherwise. Cooptees parrot the Party's talking points, deflect narratives harmful to Beijing's image, host public events that showcase the Party's virtues, promote trade and investment, encourage technology transfers, and voice support for changes in European policies favorable to China.

These friendship groups also serve longer term, if less visible, aims. They are often at the heart of a complex, overlapping, and mutually reinforcing network of political, business, social, and cultural ties intended to generate support for the CCP among foreign elites and public audiences. Leaders and members of these associations serve as facilitators for Chinese politicians, businessmen, and other elites who seek connections with European leaders and institutions. Ideally, for the CCP, the foreign elites cultivated through these groups will continue to rise in importance and actively influence national policy or, less transparently, by acting as lobbyists or policy advisors to national-level figures.

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6 We are indebted to Nadege Rolland and Russell Hsiao for their suggestions on developing an analytical framework tailored to friendship groups.

Leninist political parties have long employed friendship associations to obtain overseas support. Shortly after the Soviet Union's founding, for example, Moscow developed friendship groups abroad as a means to establish surrogates, distribute propaganda, and collect intelligence.<sup>7</sup> The Chinese Communist Party inherited the Soviet tradition of leveraging friendship associations as a way to accrue power.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, as early as the 1930s, the CCP and the Communist Party USA sought backing from sympathizers in the United States through an organization called the American Friends of the Chinese People.<sup>9</sup> In the 1950s, before the PRC gained diplomatic recognition from much of the West, Beijing used friendship groups to cultivate ties with Western politicians and political parties. Western interest in and attention to such associations have fluctuated based on their relative activism. During the period of China's Cold War isolation, Western intelligence agencies were alert to the CCP's friendship groups. After China established formal diplomatic relations with many European and North American countries in the 1970s, Beijing accorded less importance to these associations and Western concerns about friendships groups waned thereafter.<sup>10</sup>

This study contends that Europe, and the West more broadly, have good reasons to again pay attention to China's obscure and seemingly innocuous friendship associations. These groups have been resurgent in recent decades, with China establishing new associations throughout the West, particularly since the early 2000s. The Party relies on the lure of prestige, access, and resources to groom and coopt foreign proxies, exerting a corrupting influence on leading citizens of Europe. The CCP exploits the openness of liberal democracies to encourage the proliferation of front organizations such as friendship groups. These local chapters in turn count on the freedoms afforded to civil society groups in the West to advance the Party's aims. Freedom of speech, for example, allows local fronts and their coopted members to spread Party propaganda and to criticize and deflect narratives that the CCP finds objectionable. More troubling, the friendship associations have adopted positions, including the defense of China's human rights record, that are antithetical to Europe's values.

The friendship groups' ties to governments and business communities in Europe, by virtue of their leadership and members, lend them an aura of authority that can be highly misleading. The groups' apparent political connections convey the false impression that the groups' views and positions, which align with that of the CCP, enjoy official sanction

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7 See *Soviet Sponsored Societies of Friendship and Cultural Relations*, (McLean, VA: Central Intelligence Agency, 1957, available at <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP78-00915R000800190022-9.pdf> and Louis Nezmer, "The Soviet Friendship Societies," *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 13, No. 2, Summer 1949.

8 While the Soviets typically employed the KGB to run front organizations, the CCP relies on a wide array of party and state organs to facilitate proxies. We thank John Dotson for this insight.

9 *Potentialities of Chinese Communist Intelligence Activities in the United States* (Washington, DC: Federal Bureau of Investigation, 1954), pp. 19-21, available at <https://archive.org/details/FBIPRCSpying/page/n7/mode/2up>. We thank Joe O'Neill for alerting us to this history.

10 *The United Front in Communist China*, (McLean, VA: Central Intelligence Agency, 1957), available at <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP78-00915R000600210003-9.pdf> and Division of Research for Far East, "Communist China's 'People's Diplomacy'" (Washington, DC: Department of State, 1957), available at <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP78-00915R000700060004-4.pdf>.

across European capitals. As one study notes, by purporting to speak on behalf of European constituents, the friendship groups' endorsements of the party's policies create the illusion that Beijing enjoys widespread international support.<sup>11</sup> This façade has a dual purpose: it is tailored to convince the public at home that the CCP's policies are popular overseas and to persuade foreign audiences to join those who already back the Party's policy direction.

The friendship associations' murky status is especially problematic to liberal democratic institutions. These unofficial groups operate in civil society where mechanisms for oversight tend to be lax. Friendship groups can thus become indirect channels of influence for foreign powers and unelected interest groups and individuals. The groups can serve as vehicles for lobbying European governments and officials on behalf of the CCP and as backdoors to shaping the policymaking process. To the extent that friendship associations bypass democratic institutions to shape European legislative and policy outcomes, they are a potential challenge to sovereignty. Over time, should the Party's practices, its perspectives, and its proxies become more acceptable or normalized in Europe, then Beijing will have made progress in expanding and entrenching its illiberal influence. These risks behoove policymakers to stay alert to friendship groups.

The purpose of this report is to assess the role and relative effectiveness of friendship associations as one among many elements of China's influence campaign in Europe. The report provides three short case studies on the EU-China Friendship Group, the Italy-China Friendship Association, and the Czech-China Chamber of Collaboration. The cases were selected to cover different parts of a complex and diverse region, to assess Chinese influence at the sub-national, national, and supranational levels in Europe, to engage in cross-case comparisons, and to discern patterns in CCP operations. The study draws heavily from Chinese-language sources that frequently reveal insights unavailable in English. This report finds that much can be gleaned from the reporting by the Party's own mouthpieces.

It is worth reiterating that this study focuses narrowly on one dimension of China's multifaceted influence campaign in Europe. The case studies, for example, do not comprehensively detail all Chinese influence operations and do not provide an exhaustive coverage of all the actors and the vast networks to which these actors are a part. Other excellent reports cited above have documented the broad range of the PRC's political activities in Europe and have examined how the Party advances its aims through many agents of influence simultaneously. The goal of this report is to highlight one strain of Chinese influence: CCP-affiliated friendship groups led by coopted foreigners.

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11 Lulu, "Repurposing Democracy," p. 2.

## A Primer on the United Front

To diagnose the challenge of Chinese influence operations, it is important to assess the phenomenon as the Chinese Communist Party understands it. The CCP employs the umbrella term “united front” to describe its rationales and approach to influence campaigns, including those carried out abroad. Notably, the term carries distinct meanings for the Party. United front can be understood conceptually, institutionally, or instrumentally.<sup>12</sup> As a concept, the united front is Leninist in its origins.<sup>13</sup> The concept calls for a Leninist organization to form alliances of convenience with other political parties, social groups, and individuals, to whatever extent necessary, to strengthen the overall position of the Leninist party and to sow division among its enemies. The CCP, from its earliest years, embraced and developed this tactic. The Party repeatedly used united front tactics to weaken its enemies, particularly against its Nationalist antagonist during the Chinese Civil War.<sup>14</sup>

The term united front also refers to institutions that implement the Party’s directives. At the highest level, this united front architecture is overseen by General Secretary Xi Jinping through the Central United Front Leading Small Group. This apex organization is an inter-agency body that brings together various stakeholders across the party-state apparatus, including those belonging to united front, foreign affairs, and propaganda bureaucracies.<sup>15</sup> Members of the leading small group include representatives from the Central Committee United Front Work Department, the Central Committee Propaganda Department, and the Central Committee Organization Department among others. The CCP’s Central Committee departments, which answer to the Party’s top leadership, enjoy considerable clout, owing to their central roles in controlling state and society.<sup>16</sup> Alex Joske speculates that the Central Committee International Liaison Department, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of State Security, and the Ministry of Public Security might have been represented at the leading small group.<sup>17</sup>

12 Toshi Yoshihara, “Evaluating the Logic and Methods of China’s United Front Work,” *Orbis* 64, no. 2, Spring 2020, pp. 230-248.

13 Anne-Marie Brady, “Magic Weapons: China’s Political Influence Activities under Xi Jinping,” conference paper from “The Corrosion of Democracy under China’s Global Influence,” Arlington, VA, September 16–17, 2017, pp. 2-3, available at <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/magic-weapons-chinas-political-influence-activities-under-xi-jinping>.

14 Thomas G. Mahnken, Ross Babbage, and Toshi Yoshihara, *Countering Comprehensive Coercion: Competitive Strategies Against Authoritarian Political Warfare* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2018), p 45.

15 Alex Joske, “The Central United Front Work Leading Small Group: Institutionalising united front work,” *Sinopsis*, July 23, 2019, available at <https://sinopsis.cz/en/joske-united-front-work-lsg/>.

16 Two analysts liken the Central Committee to a “board of directors for the CCP” vested with the authority to select members of the Politburo and the Politburo Standing Committee. See Eleanor Albert and Beina Xu, “The Chinese Communist Party,” Council on Foreign Relations, updated September 27, 2019, available at <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/chinese-communist-party>. Susan Shirk describes the Central Committee’s departments as elements of a “control cartel” that wield substantial influence over the Party’s top leadership and boast “exceptional political independence.” See Susan Shirk, *China: Fragile Superpower* (London: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 42.

17 Joske, “The Central United Front Work Leading Small Group.”



Although specific institutions fall within the formal united front system under Xi's leading small group, the CCP insists that all Party bureaucracies and members must engage in united front activities.<sup>18</sup> As Peter Mattis and Alex Joske note, "From the party's Politburo Standing Committee down to its grassroots committees, united front work involves thousands of members, social organizations, and fronts. Wherever the party is found, be it a government ministry or a party committee in a joint venture, the united front system is likely to be operating."<sup>19</sup> It is an all-of-Party enterprise that cuts across the part-state-military apparatus. For example, the Political Work Department Liaison Bureau of the People's Liberation Army conducts united front operations.<sup>20</sup> As this study shows, state institutions with murky organizational ties to the larger party-state architecture can also be considered united front organizations.

As an instrument of the CCP, "united front work" refers to a wide range of influence activities designed to fulfill the Party's aims at home and abroad.<sup>21</sup> United front work draws from the CCP's entire party-state-military apparatus to "influence, indoctrinate, and mobilize non-CCP persons and organizations to serve the Party's objectives."<sup>22</sup> United front work seeks to increase the relative power of the Party by bringing social classes, groups, and individuals at home and abroad under its tent. It seeks to coopt and neutralize its targets to obtain support or to reduce resistance to the CCP's domestic and foreign goals. As one united front publication argues, "The bottom line of the united front is to increase as many people that support us and reduce as many people that oppose us."<sup>23</sup> More specifically, united front work seeks to achieve four main objectives:

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- 18 Anne Marie Brady, "On the Correct Use of Terms," *China Brief* 19, no. 9, May 9, 2019, available at <https://jamestown.org/program/on-the-correct-use-of-terms-for-understanding-united-front-work/>. See also Martin Hála, "United Front Work by Other Means: China's 'Economic Diplomacy' in Central and Eastern Europe," *China Brief* 19, no. 9, May 9, 2019, available at <https://jamestown.org/program/united-front-work-by-other-means-chinas-economic-diplomacy-in-central-and-eastern-europe/>.
- 19 Peter Mattis and Alex Joske, "The Third Magic Weapon: Reforming China's United Front," *War on the Rocks*, June 24, 2019, available at <https://warontherocks.com/2019/06/the-third-magic-weapon-reforming-chinas-united-front/>.
- 20 According to the Defense Intelligence Agency, the Political Work Department Liaison Bureau is "the PLA's principle organization responsible for political warfare." See *China Military Power: Modernizing a Force to Fight and Win*, (Washington, DC: Defense Intelligence Agency, 2019), p. 99.
- 21 Given the existence of a formal united front system under the leading small group, which is distinct from other united front bureaucracies that fall outside of formal system, Alex Joske suggests that it may be useful to make a linguistic distinction between "united front work" conducted by those within the formal system and "united front tactics" employed by those operating outside the formal system. See Joske, "The Central United Front Work Leading Small Group." For the sake of simplicity, this study uses the terms united front work and united front tactics interchangeably, with the understanding that not all party-state organs belong to the formal united front system.
- 22 Russell Hsiao, "A Preliminary Survey of CCP Influence Operations in Japan," *China Brief* 19, no. 12, June 26, 2019, available at <https://jamestown.org/program/united-front-work-by-other-means-chinas-economic-diplomacy-in-central-and-eastern-europe/>.
- 23 中共中央统战部编著 [United Front Work Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, ed.], 巩固发展最广泛的爱国统一战线 [Consolidate and Develop the Most Extensive Patriotic United Front] (Beijing: Huawen Press, 2016), p. 175.

- **Keep the party in power:** United front work guarantees the party's dominance and ensures that the CCP's monopoly on political power remains unrivaled.
- **Strengthen China's national power:** United front work helps to build China's comprehensive national power and to achieve China's long-term strategic success, including Xi's "China Dream," a mid-century project that would vault China to the front ranks of the great powers in socioeconomic and military terms.
- **Defend China's sovereignty:** United front work defends China's territorial integrity and unity, including the enforcement and promotion of the "one country, two systems" model with Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan.
- **Ensure a favorable external environment:** United front efforts strive to shape an international environment conducive to China's foreign policy initiatives, such as Xi's Belt and Road Initiative.<sup>24</sup>

Consonant with these objectives, united front work targets both domestic and, increasingly, foreign audiences.<sup>25</sup> United front work has historically focused on undermining the CCP's enemies from within, to include members of other political parties, religious groups, and ethnic minorities. Since the 1989 Tiananmen Square Massacre, this work has extended to overseas Chinese, regardless of their citizenship.<sup>26</sup> More recently, united front work has explicitly targeted foreigners of non-Chinese descent, particularly in politics, business, and the media.

To fulfill the four objectives above, the international element of united front work, according to Anne-Marie Brady, involves four lines of operations. First, united front work seeks to assert control over ethnic Chinese communities abroad, using them as agents of CCP influence and stymieing their opposition to the Party's policies. Second, it coopts foreigners, enticing them to defend and advance the Chinese Communist Party's positions abroad and to furnish valuable intelligence and know-how. Third, it wages a sophisticated and complex global strategic communications campaign via a vast network of print and online media to promote the CCP's foreign policies and to deflect or delegitimize international criticism of the Party. Finally, it mobilizes global support to China's ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), a massive project that aims to connect China to the rest of Eurasia through economic, infrastructure, and communication networks.<sup>27</sup>

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24 中共中央统战部 编著 [United Front Work Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, ed.], 党政干部统一战线知识读本 [*Party and Government Cadre United Front: Knowledge Reader*] (Beijing: People's Press, 2016), pp. 34-38.

25 Groot, "The CCP's Grand United Front abroad."

26 Groot, "The CCP's Grand United Front abroad."

27 Brady, "On the Correct Use of Terms."

Because the external environment and the targets of cooption themselves may be hostile to the CCP, the Party strives to avoid triggering antibodies to its influence campaign. Indirect methods that involve manipulation, corruption, cooption, infiltration, and subversion are thus essential to the success of united front work. To be sure, Western analysts, possessing the right skillsets, have made important contributions to understanding the phenomenon of PRC influence.<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless, uncertainties remain over the united front's inner workings, including important aspects of the organizational structure powering the Party's influence operations. Due to their nontransparent practices, Western scholars have had to sift through sources, look closely, and piece together the evidence to determine important facts about united front actors and draw inferences about their impact. Indeed, "smoking guns" that lay bare the CCP's efforts and that allow foreign analysts to explicitly link united front activities to specific policy outcomes remain elusive. There is thus an ongoing need in the West to continue the investigation of CCP influence. This brief summary of the united front system provides a framework for understanding how friendship groups fit into the CCP's broader influence campaign in Europe.

## Friendship Groups in the United Front Context

Friendship associations conform to the Leninist concept of united front. They seek to forge alliances of convenience with foreign counterparts in Europe to strengthen the Party's image and position, weaken resistance to the CCP's goals, and render the environment more hospitable to Beijing's aims. Further, friendship groups are linked to China-based institutions—that fall within and outside the formal united front system—from which the groups obtain access, visibility, resources, and possibly direction. The Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries (CPAFFC, detailed below) appears to be one of the friendship groups' sponsors. In terms of united front work, the CCP cultivates ties with these groups and their coopted members through: mutual exchanges of visiting delegations, including all-expenses-paid trips to China; access to high-level Chinese officials; material and moral support; high visibility initiatives that promote Beijing's agenda; resources for administration of the groups; and possibly recruitment of new members to the groups.

The pattern of the friendship groups' behavior and the groups' interactions with the Party also align with Brady's description of the CCP's international united front work. The groups serve as legal vehicles for coopting foreigners friendly to China. The promise of leadership positions within the groups, privileged access to Chinese officialdom, and lucrative business opportunities encourage European individuals to lead or join the groups. The groups' leaders can claim to enjoy access to senior CCP officials and insider information about China while the Party can show that foreign friends support Beijing's various causes. The goal is to mutually curry favor and reciprocally confer legitimacy on each other.

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28 Alex Joske, "Reorganizing the United Front Work Department: New Structures for a New Era of Diaspora and Religious Affairs Work," *China Brief* 19, No. 9, May 9, 2019, available at <https://jamestown.org/program/reorganizing-the-united-front-work-department-new-structures-for-a-new-era-of-diaspora-and-religious-affairs-work/>.

The coopted individuals that lead the friendship associations, in turn, act as surrogates for the Party and actively promote the CCP's views. Their opinions, which mirror those of Beijing's, are frequently cited by government-controlled Chinese media outlets to lend weight to Beijing's policies in Europe. The CCP also takes the liberty of speaking on behalf of these "ambassadors" in the news. The media reports, telegraphed to domestic and foreign audiences alike, project the false impression that the CCP's policies enjoy wide acceptance. Collectively, these tailored messages mutually reinforce each other, creating an echo chamber. In short, the proxies become instruments of the Party's propaganda machine. The groups' leaders have also been drawn into new projects and organizations designed to support the Belt and Road Initiative, an indicator of Beijing's new foreign policy priorities.

There are additional qualities that make friendship groups a useful tool for united front work. Their ostensible standing as civil society organizations allows these groups to speak freely and to interact with audiences in Europe who may otherwise be reluctant to associate directly with the CCP. They enjoy access to corridors of power in Europe, thus giving the CCP indirect levers of influence. Their legal and homegrown status permits the CCP's agents of influence to hide in plain sight and to engage with counterparts in China under less scrutiny, while still giving the Party plausible deniability. The groups' operational space in civil society, which frequently lacks oversight mechanisms, appeals to the Party's penchant for avoiding attention. The CCP appears to favor anonymity over efficiency and effectiveness. The friendship associations allow the Party to maintain a low profile while keeping conduits of influence, however limited they may seem, open at low cost.

In addition to these important characteristics of the friendship groups, there is a built-in institutional structure in China that can support united front work with foreign proxies. This study examines the CPAFFC—one among many CCP-led organs with ties to Europe's friendship groups—to illustrate how the Party establishes or develops relationships with European front organizations.<sup>29</sup> The CPAFFC was set up in 1954 during China's deep isolation in the post-Korean War period.<sup>30</sup> It was tasked to develop people-to-people ties with countries that did not have formal diplomatic relations with the PRC. Following the reform and opening under Deng Xiaoping and China's normalization of ties with most countries around the

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29 In a speech to the National Governors Association on February 8, 2020, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo singled out the CPAFFC as a "foreign influence agency" of the CCP. Pompeo warned that the CPAFFC was seeking to cultivate ties at the state and local levels to advance the CCP's goals, including investments in state pension funds and sensitive national security-related industries. The speech shows that the CPAFFC has attracted attention at the highest levels of the U.S. government. Michael R. Pompeo, "U.S. States and the China Competition" (speech, National Governors Association Winter Meeting, Washington, DC, February 8, 2020), available at <https://www.state.gov/u-s-states-and-the-china-competition/>.

30 When founded in 1954, the organization was called the Chinese People's Association for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries. It was renamed the Chinese People's Association for Cultural Relations and Friendship with Foreign Countries in 1966 and obtained its current title in 1969. See John Dotson, "China Explores Economic Outreach to U.S. States Via United Front Entities," *China Brief* 19, no. 12, June 26, 2019, available at <https://jamestown.org/program/china-explores-economic-outreach-to-u-s-states-via-united-front-entities/>.

world, the association declined in relative importance, but has seen its star rise again in recent years under Xi.

Institutionally, the CPAFFC is a constituent of the Chinese government's foreign affairs bureaucracy. However, there remains uncertainty about where it belongs precisely within the party-state organizational structure. The CPAFFC is not directly subordinate to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Rather, the Ministry appears to have some oversight and management responsibilities over the CPAFFC, possibly on behalf of another organization. John Dotson, for example, speculates that the CPAFFC may fall under the Foreign Ministry and the Central Committee Foreign Affairs Commission in a type of dual-leadership arrangement.<sup>31</sup> Given that CPAFFC leaders have served previously in overseas assignments at PRC embassies, Dotson asserts that, "Senior officials of the CPAFFC have clear ties to the PRC Foreign Ministry."<sup>32</sup> Regardless of its exact chain of command, the CPAFFC is an organ of the CCP party-state and Anne-Marie Brady describes it as "a united front organization."<sup>33</sup>

The CPAFFC has a broad mandate to pursue "people-to-people diplomacy," which includes exchanges and cooperation with foreigners at the supranational, national, and local levels. In advancing China's four overall goals of united front work, the CPAFFC's efforts span various fields, including politics, business, trade, science and technology, medicine, environmental protection, and arts, culture, and sports.<sup>34</sup> But people-to-people diplomacy is not equivalent to non-governmental diplomacy, as the CPAFFC is "supported and sponsored" by the Chinese government<sup>35</sup> and CPAFFC officials openly state that the organization strives to support the PRC's foreign policy goals.<sup>36</sup> Yet the CPAFFC often downplays its close relations

31 John Dotson, "CPAFFC and the United Front Strategy of "Sub-National Engagement" (PowerPoint presentation, Jamestown Foundation Ninth Annual China Defense and Security Conference, Washington, DC, October 15, 2019), available at [https://jamestown.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Dotson\\_Presentation.pdf?x28725](https://jamestown.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Dotson_Presentation.pdf?x28725).

32 John Dotson, "China Explores Economic Outreach to U.S. States Via United Front Entities."

33 Ann-Marie Brady, "Magic Weapons," p. 34.

34 "协会简介 [Association Introduction]," 中国人民对外友好协会 [The Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries], accessed February 9, 2020, available at [https://web.archive.org/web/20200209222144/https://www.cpaffc.org.cn/index/xiehui/xiehui\\_list/cate/2/lang/1.html](https://web.archive.org/web/20200209222144/https://www.cpaffc.org.cn/index/xiehui/xiehui_list/cate/2/lang/1.html). See also "中国友好和平发展基金会 [China Friendship Foundation for Peace & Development]," 中国人民对外友好协会 [The Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries], accessed February 9, 2020, available at [https://web.archive.org/web/20200209233255/https://www.cpaffc.org.cn/index/xiehui/zuzhijigou\\_detail/id/10/lang/1.html](https://web.archive.org/web/20200209233255/https://www.cpaffc.org.cn/index/xiehui/zuzhijigou_detail/id/10/lang/1.html).

35 "对外友协与民间外交 [The Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries and People-to-People Diplomacy]," 中华人民共和国中央人民政府 [The Central People's Government of the People's Republic of China], accessed December 20, 2019, available at [https://web.archive.org/web/20191220223135/http://www.gov.cn/test/2011-12/21/content\\_2025664.htm](https://web.archive.org/web/20191220223135/http://www.gov.cn/test/2011-12/21/content_2025664.htm).

36 李建平 [Li Jianping], "李建平副会长在意大利对华友好协会成立大会上的致辞 [Vice-President Li Jianping's Speech at the Establishment Ceremony of the Italy-China Friendship Association]" (speech, Italy-China Friendship Association Establishment Ceremony, Rome, Italy, September 18, 2014), available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20200103174207/https://www.icfa.eu/2014/09/18/discorso-li-jianping/>.

to the Chinese government and the Chinese Communist Party by describing its work as “NGO [non-governmental] exchanges” on its English-language website.<sup>37</sup>

The CPAFFC claims to have established 46 friendship associations abroad and developed cooperative relationships with nearly 500 groups in 157 countries.<sup>38</sup> The association is a conduit through which these foreign groups, including China’s friendship groups in Europe, obtain access to prominent CCP leaders and high-level meetings. The CPAFFC is also responsible for establishing sister city relationships between Chinese and foreign cities.<sup>39</sup> Beijing sees these local relationships as valuable instruments to influence foreign audiences during turbulent periods in national-level diplomatic relations<sup>40</sup> and to entice or coerce foreign acknowledgment of CCP policy positions, particularly on sovereignty issues.<sup>41</sup> To support the development of relations at the local level, the national-level CPAFFC is mirrored by associations at lower levels of government, including in provincial governments (e.g. The Guangdong People’s Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries), China’s centrally-controlled municipalities (i.e. Beijing, Tianjin, Shanghai, and Chongqing), and some other cities, districts, and counties.<sup>42</sup> These lower-level associations work toward the same goals as the CPAFFC, though in relation to their respective localities.

The CPAFFC’s European work is conducted under its Department of European and Asian Affairs, which appears to be applying a coordinated strategy across European countries. CPAFFC strategy documents discuss approaches for influencing Europe-wide audiences,

37 “NGO Exchanges,” The Chinese People’s Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries, available at [https://web.archive.org/web/20200209213327/https://www.cpaffc.org.cn/index/news/news\\_list/id/13/lang/2.html](https://web.archive.org/web/20200209213327/https://www.cpaffc.org.cn/index/news/news_list/id/13/lang/2.html).

38 “协会简介 [Association Introduction],” 中国人民对外友好协会 [The Chinese People’s Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries].

39 For an excellent analysis of CCP’s influence strategy directed at the local levels of foreign countries, including sister-city schemes, see Anne-Marie Brady, “Submission to the Justice Select Committee Inquiry into Foreign Interference,” New Zealand Parliament, May 2019, available at <https://www.newsroom.co.nz/2019/05/08/575479/anne-marie-bradys-full-submission>.

40 For example, see this CPAFFC press release on then-CPAFFC President Li Xiaolin’s meetings with local U.S. government officials in 2019: “President [sic] Li Xiaolin Meets with Leadership of US Subnational Organizations,” The Chinese People’s Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries, January 16, 2019, available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20200209210346/https://www.cpaffc.org.cn/index/news/detail/id/5603/lang/2.html>.

41 As part of at least some sister city agreements, the CPAFFC has insisted on the inclusion of language on national-level foreign policy, in particular that Taiwan be regarded as part of the People’s Republic of China. If local governments later object to this language, the CCP then seeks to use the benefits of the sister city agreement as leverage, threatening to suspend or cancel various arrangements. For example, consider China’s response when the Prague municipal government objected to a clause on the PRC’s One China policy in its sister city agreement with Beijing: Marc Santora, “The Broken Promise of a Panda: How Prague’s Relations With Beijing Soured,” *The New York Times*, November 23, 2019, available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/23/world/europe/china-prague-taiwan.html>.

42 “协会简介 [Association Introduction],” 中国人民对外友好协会 [The Chinese People’s Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries]. For examples, see “Guangdong People’s Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries,” Guangdong People’s Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries, available at [https://web.archive.org/web/20200209222609/http://www.gdfao.gov.cn/Category\\_331/Index.aspx](https://web.archive.org/web/20200209222609/http://www.gdfao.gov.cn/Category_331/Index.aspx) and “友协门户—首页 [Friendship Association Portal – Home Page],” 北京市人民对外友好协会 [Beijing People’s Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries], available at [https://web.archive.org/web/20200209223138/http://www.bjyx.org.cn/portal/yxportal/?portal\\_id=12](https://web.archive.org/web/20200209223138/http://www.bjyx.org.cn/portal/yxportal/?portal_id=12).

such as through developing and leveraging relationships with European think tanks.<sup>43</sup> The CPAFFC likely sees national-level friendship groups as initial beachheads through which China can continually build influence over time as events allow, pushing on doors as they open.

The current president of the CPAFFC is Lin Songtian, who was appointed to the position in April 2020. Before assuming this post, Lin was a diplomat in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and he spent most of his career focused on Africa policy, including in his last diplomatic posting as China's ambassador to South Africa.<sup>44</sup> From September 2019 to March 2020, he gained some notoriety in the West through his outspokenness on social media. On his now-deleted Twitter account, he criticized U.S. foreign policy and promoted the conspiracy theory that Covid-19 originated in the United States.<sup>45</sup>

Lin's predecessor, Li Xiaolin, led the CPAFFC for most of the last decade. Li is a member of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), the party's highest-level united front organization that provides the institutional umbrella over non-CCP political parties and individuals. Her father, Li Xiannian, held top posts, including the presidency, vice chairmanship of the CCP, and the chairmanship of the National Committee of the CPPCC. Li is also married to General Liu Yazhou, a former deputy political commissar of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) Air Force and a former political commissar of the PLA's National Defense University, who reportedly had the ear of Xi Jinping during his first term as general secretary of the CCP.<sup>46</sup> Li's predecessor, Chen Haosu, led the institution from 2000 to 2011. Another princeling, he is the son of Chen Yi, one of the ten towering marshals of Mao Zedong's military and a former foreign minister. In short, the friendship groups in Europe fall within the purview of at least one united front organization that boasts a long history, a long-term and region-wide strategy, and political clout.

To better understand friendship associations, the following chapters provide a snapshot of proxy operations in the European Parliament, Italy, and the Czech Republic. Other earlier

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43 卞庆祖 [Bian Qingzu], “欧美智库与民间外交 [European and American Think Tanks and People-to-People Diplomacy],” 中国人民对外友好协会 [The Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries], April 2, 2013, available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20161023163738/www.cpaffc.org.cn/content/details25-23054.html>.

44 “林松添大使任中国人民对外友好协会会长 [Ambassador Lin Songtian is Appointed President of the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries],” 中国人民对外友好协会 [The Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries], April 13, 2020, available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20200511234508/https://cpaffc.org.cn/index/news/detail/id/6883/lang/1.html>.

45 Eric Olander, “China's Former Ambassador to South Africa, Lin Songtian, is Officially Gone,” *The China-Africa Project*, March 24, 2020, available at <https://chinaafricaproject.com/analysis/chinas-former-ambassador-to-south-africa-lin-songtian-is-officially-gone/>. See also Peter Fabricius, “Sudden recall of China's ambassador to SA raises questions, offers few answers,” *Daily Maverick*, 19 March 2020, available at <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2020-03-19-sudden-recall-of-chinas-ambassador-to-sa-raises-questions-offers-few-answers/> and Carien du Plessis, “China's ambassador to SA could be on his way out,” *News24*, March 19, 2020, available at <https://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/chinas-ambassador-to-sa-could-be-on-his-way-out-20200319>.

46 Katsuji Nakazawa, “Xi Jinping bids adieu to his fellow princelings,” *Nikkei Asian Review*, November 27, 2017, available at <https://asia.nikkei.com/Editor-s-Picks/China-up-close/Xi-Jinping-bids-adieu-to-his-fellow-princelings2>.

studies cited above have already furnished in-depth assessments of these friendship groups and their interrelationships with the CCP's wide network of influence actors. Rather than reprise the exhaustive research of these original works, the case studies in this report are vignettes meant to illustrate some key features of these front organizations. Each case profiles the current or former leader of the group, offers examples of how the individuals and the groups have sought to advance the CCP's goals and narratives, and assesses the relative effectiveness of the leaders and the associations. It is worth reiterating that the friendship groups represent one element of a larger network comprising numerous overlapping and mutually supporting organizations that seeks to expand and strengthen CCP influence at all levels of state and society.

This study defines local friendship groups in Europe broadly and examines entities that are loosely alike. The friendship associations documented below are not replicas of each other. Rather, they possess unique institutional characteristics. Some appear to be voluntary groups that draw their memberships from individuals interested in China. Others seem to be creations of the CCP. Various CCP organs and Chinese government agencies, including the CPAFFC, maintain contacts with the friendship associations. The CPAFFC may not necessarily be the most important to these local friendship groups. The linkages and the depths of the relationships between the friendship groups and CPAFFC vary widely. Some ties appear to be more formal and regularized while others are informal with episodic contacts between the groups and the CPAFFC. This study contends that there is analytical value in observing variations across different groups as well as discerning differences in terms of the associations' relationships with the CPAFFC.



## CHAPTER 3

# The EU-China Friendship Group

The activities of the EU-China Friendship Group fit the pattern of united front work summarized above.<sup>47</sup> Unlike formal committees and delegations of the EU Parliament, these parliamentary-based friendship groups have no institutional standing, statutory authority, or decision-making powers and do not speak for the Parliament. Participation in such groups is voluntary and is based on the interests of individual parliamentarians. These largely unregulated groups, which make them unaccountable to the public, have proliferated in recent years, raising concerns that they open backdoors to lobbying on behalf of authoritarian regimes.<sup>48</sup> Problematically, media outlets inadvertently confer more authority to these friendship groups than warranted by citing them as if they reflect the official views of the EU Parliament.

The EU-China Friendship Group, founded in 2006, comprises members of the European Parliament and is reportedly the largest friendship group within the EU's legislative branch.<sup>49</sup> Intriguingly, Gai Lin, the secretary general of the group and an advisor to the group's members, is purportedly the first Chinese national to work in the European Parliament in an official capacity.<sup>50</sup> As Jichang Lulu points out, Gai was appointed to a provincial level People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries to serve as a

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- 47 Jichang Lulu is the first to document the "friendship cluster" of which the EU-China friendship group is a part. The author finds that the friendship group is linked to a variety of European organizations promoting cooperation between Europe and China and documents this cluster's interrelationships with various CCP-led influence agents. See Jichang Lulu, "Repurposing democracy."
- 48 Nikolaj Nielsen, "MEP friendship groups offer 'backdoor' for pariah regimes," *EUobserver*, April 20, 2018, available at <https://euobserver.com/institutional/141654>.
- 49 "欧洲议会欧中友好小组 [European Parliament EU-China Friendship Group]," 欧盟—中国友好协会 [EU-China Friendship Association], available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20191221053345/http://www.eu-cfa.com/lists/OZYHOZYHXH.html>. Jichang Lulu casts doubt on the claim concerning the size of the friendship group. See Jichang Lulu, "Repurposing democracy," pp. 10-11.
- 50 For the claim about Gai Lin's working status at the European Parliament, see <https://web.archive.org/web/20191221053345/http://www.eu-cfa.com/en/lists/OZYHOZYHXH.html>. For more information on Gai, see Jichang Lulu, "Repurposing democracy," p. 13.

member of its oversea council, an indication that the friendship group is tied in some way to the Party's foreign affairs bureaucratic system.<sup>51</sup> The EU-China Friendship Association, established in 2010, includes members of the EU-China Friendship Group and prominent members of the private sector, academia, and other communities.<sup>52</sup> The association provides an institutional forum to facilitate visits to and from China and to host events in Brussels and Strasbourg, the institutional homes of the European Parliament. The group and the association work in tandem to promote EU-China relations.

The story of Nirj Deva, the chairman of the EU-China Friendship Group until mid-2019, is illustrative.<sup>53</sup> During Deva's active service as chair, he was concurrently a British Member of the European Parliament. He resigned his chairmanship when he lost his seat in parliament. A former member of the British Parliament, Deva's leading role in the group's activities during his time as an EU parliamentarian shows how unofficial organizations can serve as conduits for CCP influence. The CPAFFC has served as a counterpart to the group. In May 2007, Deva led a delegation of the friendship group on its first visit to China at the invitation of CPAFFC.<sup>54</sup> Deva's group met with the then chairman of the association, Chen Haosu. In 2015 and 2016, the director of the CPAFFC, Li Xiaolin, met with Deva and his delegation in Beijing.<sup>55</sup>

Among these various exchanges, there was at least one instance when coverage of a visit to China that appeared manipulative, if not deceptive. The Chinese-language version of the EU-China Friendship Association's website revealed a private conversation between Gai Lin, who is concurrently the secretary general of the EU-China Friendship Group and the rapporteur for the EU-China Friendship Association, and an unnamed member of the European Parliament. After a government-guided tour of Tibet in 2016, the parliamentarian reportedly confided in Gai that the visit had "completely overturned" his preconceptions of Tibet. He now understood that Tibet was always a part of China, according to Gai. He praised the Chinese government's respect for the local religion and cultural heritage and the authority's

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51 Jichang Lulu, "Repurposing democracy," p. 23.

52 When used in reference to a singular organization in this section, the term "friendship group" refers to the EU-China Friendship Group, while the term "friendship association" refers to the EU-China Friendship Association.

53 Deva is one among other noteworthy members of the friendship group. For example, the former vice chair and former British member of the European Parliament, Derek Vaughan, has also engaged in activities similar to those of Deva profiled in this case study.

54 "小组应中国人民对外友好协会邀请首次访华 [Group Agrees to Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries' Invitation to Visit China for the First Time]," 欧盟—中国友好协会 [EU-China Friendship Association], November 16, 2016, available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20191221053401/http://www.eu-cfa.com/detail/258.html>.

55 "The EU-China Friendship Group visits China on invitation once again," EU-China Friendship Association, March 2, 2017, available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20191221053411/http://www.eu-cfa.com/en/detail/338.html> and "欧洲议会欧中友好小组访问北京、西藏 [European Parliament EU-China Friendship Group Visits Beijing, Tibet]," 欧盟—中国友好协会 [EU-China Friendship Association], October 20, 2016, available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20191221053505/www.eu-cfa.com/detail/242.html>.

efforts to modernize Tibet. He claimed that what he learned about Tibet on the ground did not resemble the “Western propaganda among the splittists.”<sup>56</sup>

Gai then editorialized that the parliamentarian spoke for the feelings of the entire visiting delegation. Whether the unidentified parliamentarian expressed such sentiments or whether Gai embellished or invented the conversation cannot be verified. However, the article on the association’s website was clearly designed to convey a false impression to Chinese audiences about the impact that the trip had on the visiting dignitaries.

#### FIGURE 1: EU-CHINA FRIENDSHIP GROUP DELEGATION AT THE CPAFFC IN BEIJING



Former CPAFFC President Li Xiaolin (bottom row, second from left) meets with EU-China Friendship Group Chairman Nirj Deva (bottom, row, far left), Secretary General Gai Lin (back row, far right) and other members of the group in January 2015 in Beijing.<sup>57</sup>

56 “欧洲议会欧中友好小组访问北京、西藏 [European Parliament EU-China Friendship Group Visits Beijing, Tibet],” 欧盟—中国友好协会 [EU-China Friendship Association].

57 “President Li Xiaolin Meets with Delegation of EU-China Friendship Group of European Parliament,” The Chinese People’s Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries, January 5, 2015, available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20200410002005/https://www.cpaffc.org.cn/index/news/detail/id/4755/lang/2.html>.

On March 26, 2019, under the auspices of the EU-China Friendship Group, Deva held a meeting in Strasbourg to announce the founding of the Belt and Road Initiative Policy Coordination Committee and his new position as executive chairman of the committee.<sup>58</sup> Minister Counselor Yang Xiaoguang from the Chinese Mission to the EU delivered the keynote speech at the event. Fifteen members of the EU Parliament representing such countries as Malta, the United Kingdom (UK), the Czech Republic, and Austria also attended the opening ceremony.<sup>59</sup> The committee established four working groups on the digital economy, medium- to small-scale enterprises, the environment, and cultural exchanges. Intriguingly, aside from a cursory notice by a policy watch group at a Washington law firm, the announcement was not covered anywhere else in the West.<sup>60</sup> Like the friendship group, the committee has no real standing within the EU Parliament and thus was not accorded attention. Yet, the Chinese coverage of the event conveyed the false impression that Deva had established a formal organization.

The committee quickly became a vehicle for Deva to express his views about the Belt and Road Initiative. In his new capacity as the executive chairman, Deva attended the second Belt and Road summit held in Beijing in April 2019. In an interview with a Chinese reporter, he vigorously defended China's influence in Central and Eastern Europe, describing concerns that China might splinter Europe as a "misunderstanding."<sup>61</sup> In another interview during the summit, Deva boasted that his friendship group's tireless work over the years helped the European Parliament understand China's importance to Europe as a trading partner. He rejected the view that China posed a threat. Repeating a familiar CCP talking point, Deva claimed that China had never invaded other countries in its long history while European powers had colonized others.<sup>62</sup>

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58 “欧洲议会成立“一带一路”政策沟通委员会” [European Parliament Establishes “Belt and Road Initiative’ Policy Coordination Committee”], *Xinhua*, March 28, 2019, available at [https://web.archive.org/web/20191221053604/http://www.xinhuanet.com/silkroad/2019-03/28/c\\_1210093408.htm](https://web.archive.org/web/20191221053604/http://www.xinhuanet.com/silkroad/2019-03/28/c_1210093408.htm). See also 任丽颖 [Ren Liying], “欧洲议会成立“一带一路”政策沟通委员会” [European Parliament Establishes “Belt and Road Initiative’ Policy Coordination Committee”], *Xinhua*, March 27, 2019, available at [https://web.archive.org/web/20191221053653/http://www.xinhuanet.com/world/2019-03/27/c\\_1124292325.htm](https://web.archive.org/web/20191221053653/http://www.xinhuanet.com/world/2019-03/27/c_1124292325.htm).

59 陈博 [Chen Bo], ““一带一路”政策沟通委员会成立 欧洲议会议员呼吁加强欧中合作 [‘Belt and Road Initiative’ Policy Coordination Committee Established, European Parliamentarian Calls for Strengthening Europe-China Cooperation],” *经济日报* [*Economic Daily*], April 2, 2019, available at [http://www.ce.cn/xwzx/gnsz/gdxw/201904/02/t20190402\\_31782727.shtml](http://www.ce.cn/xwzx/gnsz/gdxw/201904/02/t20190402_31782727.shtml).

60 Sebastian Vos, “The Week Ahead in the European Parliament – Monday, March 18, 2019” Global Policy Watch, Covington & Burling LLP, March 18, 2019, available at <https://www.globalpolicywatch.com/2019/03/the-week-ahead-in-the-european-parliament-monday-march-18-2019/>.

61 于潇清 and 韩丽婷 [Yu Xiaoqing and Han Liting], “中欧友好小组主席: 中欧安全领域合作潜力巨大 [EU-China Friendship Group Chairman: EU-China Security Cooperation Potential Is Huge],” *澎湃新闻* [The Paper], April 25, 2019, [https://www.thepaper.cn/newsDetail\\_forward\\_3339217](https://www.thepaper.cn/newsDetail_forward_3339217).

62 蒋琳 [Jiang Lin], “专访欧中友好小组主席德瓦: 把中国视为主要威胁是无稽之谈 [Special Interview with EU-China Friendship Group Chairman Deva: Viewing China as a Major Threat Is Complete Nonsense],” *南方都市报* [*Southern Metropolis Daily*], Sohu, April 26, 2019, available at [https://web.archive.org/web/20191221054223/http://www.sohu.com/a/310482212\\_161795](https://web.archive.org/web/20191221054223/http://www.sohu.com/a/310482212_161795).

FIGURE 2: NIRJ DEVA DELIVERS THE KEYNOTE ADDRESS AT A SESSION DEDICATED TO THE BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE DURING THE EUROPEAN BUSINESS SUMMIT IN 2019<sup>63</sup>



Back in Brussels the following month, during the annual two-day European Business Summit, Deva delivered a keynote address for a panel dedicated to the Belt and Road Initiative. The session, titled “Belt and Road 6 Years On: Towards Higher-Quality Development,” was co-hosted by the Chinese Mission to the EU, the European Business

63 “Chinese Mission to the EU Holds a Roundtable on Belt and Road Initiative,” Mission of the People’s Republic of China to the European Union, May 9, 2019, available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20191221054235/http://www.chinamission.be/eng/mh/t1662091.htm>.

Summit, and China's National Development and Reform Commission.<sup>64</sup> Ambassador Zhang Ming, the head of the Chinese mission, gave the opening remarks. A *China Daily* article on the event reported that Deva dismissed the danger of debts traps that the Belt and Road Initiative posed to recipient nations while he praised Xi's success in bringing the concept to fruition.<sup>65</sup>

Even before Deva assumed chairmanship of the committee, he organized events meant to promote good feelings about the Belt and Road Initiative. In January 2019, in collaboration with the China Maritime Museum, Deva's friendship group hosted an exhibit on Zheng He—the Ming dynasty eunuch admiral who conducted seven voyages with vast armadas across the Indian Ocean—at the EU Parliament building in Strasbourg. In a speech that kicked off the exhibition, Deva parroted official Chinese narratives about the oceanic expeditions, asserting that Zheng He never invaded or colonized the areas he visited, despite possessing the latent power to do so. This historical precedent, he hoped, would encourage Europe to view China's rise with equanimity and to support the Belt and Road Initiative.<sup>66</sup>

Deva has defended China's more problematic positions in his capacity as the chairman of the friendship group. When the Permanent Court of Arbitration handed down its unfavorable ruling against China over the South China Sea in 2016, Deva trotted out counterarguments against the Court's decision that echoed the CCP's views. In an interview with *Xinhua*, he asserted that China had always abided by international law and international convention while the Philippines violated the terms of the 2002 Code of Conduct by undertaking unilateral legal action against China. He also challenged the Court's jurisdiction over the matter.<sup>67</sup>

On the EU-China Friendship Association website, Gai Lin again revealed a fascinating backstory to Deva's interview with *Xinhua* about the South China Sea. At first, Gai persuaded Deva to accept the interview, appealing to his status as “an old friend of the Chinese people.” But, Deva's office manager attempted to prevent the interview from taking place, fearing the potential blowback from wading into a controversial topic. Gai escalated matters by calling

64 Ibid.

65 Chen Weihua, “China's EU envoy urges more BRI cooperation,” *China Daily*, May 8, 2019, available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20191221054238/https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/201905/08/WS5cd23659a3104842260ba761.html>.

66 袁昕 and 徐祥丽 [Yuan Xin and Xu Xiangli] “郑和下西洋”图片展走进欧洲议会 [‘Voyages of Zheng He’ Image Exhibit Enters European Parliament], 人民网 [People's Daily Online], January 16, 2019, available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20191221054557/http://world.people.com.cn/n1/2019/0116/c1002-30559845.html>. For early studies on CCP distortions of China's nautical past, see Toshi Yoshihara and James Holmes, “China's Energy-Driven ‘Soft Power,’” *Orbis* 52, No. 1, Winter 2008, pp. 123-137; James Holmes and Toshi Yoshihara, “Soft Power Goes to Sea,” *The American Interest* 3:4, March-April 2008, pp. 66-67; and James Holmes and Toshi Yoshihara, “Is China a ‘Soft’ Naval Power?” *China Brief*, 9, No. 17, August 20, 2009, available at <https://jamestown.org/program/is-china-a-soft-naval-power/>.

67 “菲南海仲裁引质疑 中方主张得人心——国际社会支持中国政府南海立场 [Philippine South China Sea Arbitration Called into Question, Chinese Side Advocates Obtaining Popular Support – International Community Support Chinese Government's Position on the South China Sea],” 新华 [Xinhua], July 14, 2016, available at [https://web.archive.org/web/20191221054604/http://www.xinhuanet.com/world/2016-07/14/c\\_1119219006.htm](https://web.archive.org/web/20191221054604/http://www.xinhuanet.com/world/2016-07/14/c_1119219006.htm).

in four other EU parliamentarians, members of the friendship group, for a vote on the dispute. After three members expressed support for Gai, the interview went ahead.<sup>68</sup>

Around the same time that Deva announced the policy coordination committee, Western media outlets began to scrutinize his activities. Bloomberg published an investigative essay on China's attempts to woo European officials, featuring prominently Deva and his apparent access to high-level Chinese officials. Deva not only accepted an interview for the Bloomberg article, but he was also unapologetic about his close links to Chinese interests. He defended China's positions, blamed growing European concerns about Chinese aims on "ignorance," and justified his role as a trusted interlocutor to improve mutual understanding.<sup>69</sup>

A month later, openDemocracy, a UK-based watchdog organization, drew attention to a leaked email written by Deva on the eve of a European Parliament vote on cybersecurity and 5G technologies. In the email, he urged his colleagues to be sympathetic to Huawei, a Chinese telecommunications giant whose 5G network, if built across Europe, could pose a security risk. Deva protested the "unfounded allegations" against Huawei and asserted its products had never engaged in "foul play."<sup>70</sup> The resolution, which passed overwhelmingly, nevertheless expressed "deep concern" that Chinese manufacturers could compromise Europe's telecommunications. When contacted by openDemocracy about the email, Deva was again unapologetic. He declared that he had no contact with Huawei representatives and explained that parliamentary actions against the company had to be based on evidence. He then repeated his talking point about China's economic opportunities for Europe.

In late May 2019, the United Kingdom held its EU Parliament elections. Owing to Prime Minister Theresa May's bungled campaign strategy concerning Brexit, the Conservative Party, to which Deva belonged, suffered heavy losses. Deva lost his South East England seat, ending a two-decade-long stay in office. Derek Vaughan, the vice chairman of the friendship group and a Labour Member of the EU Parliament, chose not to run for reelection, leading to temporary vacancies in the friendship group's top posts. But, it did not take long for the group to refill its ranks.

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68 "欧洲议会欧中友好小组力挺中国南海立场 [European Parliament EU-China Friendship Group Supports China's South China Sea Position], 欧盟—中国友好协会 [EU-China Friendship Association], October 20, 2016, available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20191221054910/http://www.eu-cfa.com/detail/246.html>.

69 Peter Martin and Alan Crawford, "China's Influence Digs Deep into Europe's Political Landscape," *Bloomberg*, April 3, 2019, available at <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-04-03/china-s-influence-digs-deep-into-europe-s-political-landscape>.

70 Leigh Baldwin and Peter Geoghegan, "Senior Tory revealed as Huawei cheerleader in Brussels," *openDemocracy*, May 2, 2019, available at <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/senior-tory-revealed-huawei-cheerleader-brussels/>.

FIGURE 3: CANDIDATES FOR THE PRESIDENCY OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION IN 2019



Jan Zahradil (far left) and other candidates for president of the European Commission appear at a debate in May 2019.<sup>71</sup> Zahradil's high-profile and recent appointment as Chairman of the friendship group will likely to raise the group's prominence.

On October 31, 2019, the friendship group hosted an event at the EU Parliament building in Strasbourg to announce its new leadership lineup.<sup>72</sup> Jan Zahradil, a member of the European Parliament (MEP) from the Czech Republic, and Istvan Ujhelyi, an MEP from Hungary, were appointed chairman and vice chairman of the friendship group respectively while Gai Lin was reappointed as secretary general. Importantly, Zahradil is a high-profile politician who leads a conservative coalition in the European Parliament and earned an impressive second-place finish in his unsuccessful bid for the EU presidency in 2019. Deva and Vaughan were selected to serve as honorary chair and vice chair respectively. It appears that the Party sees value in Deva despite his failure to retain his seat in the EU Parliament, suggesting a long-term commitment to foreign proxies that could remain useful to the CCP. Deva will likely continue to speak on behalf of the Party in his emeritus role.

71 European Parliament, *Debate of lead candidates for the European Commission presidency*, May 2019, Flickr, available at [https://flickr.com/photos/european\\_parliament/40894703423/in/photostream/](https://flickr.com/photos/european_parliament/40894703423/in/photostream/).

72 张朋辉 [Zhang Penghui], “为中欧关系增添正能量——记第九届欧洲议会欧中友好小组成立 [To Strengthen EU-China Positive Energy – The Ninth Session of the European Parliament EU-China Friendship Group Is Established],” 人民网 [People's Daily Online], October 31, 2019, available at [https://web.archive.org/web/20200210004551/http://paper.people.com.cn/rmrb/html/2019-10/31/nw.D110000renmrb\\_20191031\\_3-16.htm](https://web.archive.org/web/20200210004551/http://paper.people.com.cn/rmrb/html/2019-10/31/nw.D110000renmrb_20191031_3-16.htm).



This case offers a glimpse into the CCP's methods for extending its influence. The Party exploited a friendship group that was safe from oversight and accountability and that operated in a kind of political grey zone. It then cultivated ties with the group's leaders and members by hosting all-expenses-paid trips to China and by offering access to high-level Chinese leaders. The Party went to great lengths to create an aura of authority over the group that held no powers in practice. It also manipulated news coverage on its Chinese-language platforms to convey the impression that members of the EU Parliament held views that conformed to the Party's policies.

The targeted leader, Deva, in turn reciprocated by reinforcing narratives that the Party hoped to tell European audiences. While he was free to express his opinions, his slavish adherence to the party's various positions, from the inconsequential to the weighty, was problematic. Deva went on record as chairman of the friendship group to defend China's dubious legal position on the South China Sea. He even helped found the Belt and Road Initiative Policy Coordination Committee, a parallel entity to the friendship group equally lacking in institutional standing. The committee furnished him entrée to Xi's Belt and Road Initiative.

These inroads, however, must be balanced against the limits of the party's influence campaign. For example, Deva was unable to make an appreciable impact on the EU Parliament's final vote on the resolution that expressed concerns about China's role in building 5G networks in Europe. A growing consensus drowned out his voice. The party's propaganda organs confined news coverage of Deva's more controversial statements in China's defense to Chinese-language platforms, illustrating its recognition that Western audiences would balk. The CCP understands that, for now, it can only push its storyline so far.



## CHAPTER 4

# The Italy-China Friendship Association

The Italy-China Friendship Association<sup>73</sup> (hereafter, ICFA)<sup>74</sup> is an example of how the CCP advances its goals, policies, and programs abroad at the national level.<sup>75</sup> The president of ICFA, Irene Pivetti<sup>76</sup>, is a former President of the Italian Chamber of Deputies (1994-96) who has deep political and business connections in China.<sup>77</sup>

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- 73 ICFA's English name is a direct translation of the Chinese name “意大利对华友好协会.” This organization appears to be entirely separate from an Italy-China Friendship Association (意大利—中国友好协会) that existed during at least part of the Cold War. See “The Two Italy-China Societies,” *Corrispondenza Socialista* [*Socialist Correspondence*] 4, No. 4 April 1963, p. 195 in *Translations on International Communist Developments*, No. 434, U.S. Department of Commerce, May 28, 1963, available at <https://books.google.com/books?id=GgXh9-cox3wC&pg=RA6-PA65&lpg=RA6-PA65&dq=%22italy+china+friendship+association%22&source=bl&ots=JKgLzUjCwq&sig=ACfU3U1xBfpC9nqhm1S3hMaL4Hptcr1Now&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKewjQo42S5NLPahWhlHIEHX9pD64Q6AEwCHOECAoQAQ#v=onepage&q=%22italy%20china%20friendship%20association%22&f=false> and 中国—意大利 [*China—Italy*], 中国国务院新闻办公室 编著 [News Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, ed.] (Beijing: 五洲传播出版社 [*China Intercontinental Press*], 2004), available at <https://books.google.com/books?id=gDE8evAQGfYC&pg=PT85&lpg=PT85&dq=%E6%84%8F%E5%A4%A7%E5%88%A9%E4%B8%AD%E5%9B%BD%E5%8F%8B%E5%A5%BD%E5%8D%8F%E4%BC%9A&source=bl&ots=9UOAJ8XF7D&sig=ACfU3U3poYokFzRw4-9HZXtj6gDQMXdrMg&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKewilstbT6dLpAhWwlHIEHWOADVcQ6AEwCXoECAoQAQ#v=onepage&q&f=false>.
- 74 The direct translations from Italian to English in this report were performed with the assistance of machine translation.
- 75 For an earlier overview of China's influence efforts in Italy, including the role of ICFA, see Lucrezia Poggetti, “China's Growing Political Influence in Italy: A Case Study of Beijing's Influencing Tactics in Europe,” in *The Art of Deceit: How China and Russia Use Sharp Power to Subvert the West*, (London: The Henry Jackson Society, 2019), pp. 14-19.
- 76 As this report went to publication in spring 2020, Italian authorities launched an investigation into one of Irene Pivetti's companies, Only Italia Logistics, over the alleged fraudulent importation and sale of facemasks from China. In March 2020, at the peak of the coronavirus pandemic in Italy, Only Italia Logistics signed a contract with the Italian government worth over €30 million to deliver 15 million facemasks. For additional detail, see Claudio Bozza and Mario Gerevini, “Mascherine «false», indagata Irene Pivetti [«False» masks, Irene Pivetti investigated],” *Corriere della Sera*, April 28, 2020, available at [https://www.corriere.it/cronache/20\\_aprile\\_28/mascherine-affari-san-marino-scatole-vuote-holding-pivetti-3c2151c4-8985-11ea-8073-abb9eae2ee6.shtml](https://www.corriere.it/cronache/20_aprile_28/mascherine-affari-san-marino-scatole-vuote-holding-pivetti-3c2151c4-8985-11ea-8073-abb9eae2ee6.shtml); “Inchiesta sulle mascherine «false», sequestrate 250 mila protezioni a Irene Pivetti [Investigation into «false» masks, 250 thousand masks seized from Irene Pivetti],” *Corriere della Sera*, available at [https://www.corriere.it/cronache/20\\_maggio\\_05/inchiesta-mascherine-false-sequestrate-250-mila-protezioni-irene-pivetti-739be58c-8ef4-11ea-8162-438cc7478e3a.shtml](https://www.corriere.it/cronache/20_maggio_05/inchiesta-mascherine-false-sequestrate-250-mila-protezioni-irene-pivetti-739be58c-8ef4-11ea-8162-438cc7478e3a.shtml); and “Behind the mask: the inevitable PPE scandal,” *San Marino Watch*, May 7, 2020, available at <https://sanmarinowatch.wordpress.com/category/financial-scandals/>.
- 77 For Pivetti's own overview of her career, see “Chi Sono [Who I am],” available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20191220225212/https://www.irenepivetti.it/chisono>.

Information on ICFA's origins indicate that CPAFFC officials in Beijing were closely involved in the group's creation. One of the leading figures in ICFA's establishment was Luana Wang,<sup>78</sup> an Italian-citizen who originally emigrated from China and serves as President of the Sardinia China Cultural Exchange Association.<sup>79</sup> Wang, who is Secretary General of ICFA, appointed Pivetti as President of ICFA<sup>80</sup> in January 2013 at a ceremony held at CPAFFC's headquarters in Beijing and attended by Chinese media, including state-owned China Central Television (CCTV).<sup>81</sup>

ICFA then “officially presented itself to Italians” at a June 2013 inauguration ceremony<sup>82</sup> in Rome,<sup>83</sup> during which Pivetti signed a cooperation agreement with CPAFFC Vice-President Li Jianping.<sup>84</sup> In his remarks at the ceremony, Li praised Pivetti as someone who “stands out” for “convening her compatriots, to join the ranks of those friendly to China.”<sup>85</sup>

The appointment of Pivetti at CPAFFC's headquarters in Beijing prior to the group's inauguration in Italy, combined with the immediate formal cooperation between these two groups, suggests that the CPAFFC was deeply involved in the birth of ICFA itself.

78 李建平 [Li Jianping], “李建平副会长在意大利对华友好协会成立大会上的致辞 [Vice-President Li Jianping's Speech at the Establishment Ceremony of the Italy-China Friendship Association].” See also “Presentazione icfa in cina [Presentation of ICFA in China],” Italy-China Friendship Association, January 18, 2013, available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20200103170058/https://www.icfa.eu/2013/01/18/presentazione-icfa-in-cina/>.

79 “路安娜搭起中意时尚与文化交流的桥梁 [Luana Builds a Bridge for Sino-Italian Fashion and Cultural Exchange],” 纺织服装周刊 [Textile Apparel Weekly], HC360.com, September 7, 2009, available at <http://info.cloth.hc360.com/2009/09/07145894740.shtml>. Luana Wang (路安娜-王) is also known as Wang Yan (王岩).

80 There is some uncertainty over the specific current positions of Irene Pivetti and Luana Wang. On the ICFA website, certain webpages dated between 2014 and 2018 refer to Wang as ICFA president rather than secretary general, but Pivetti has also been called president over that same time. Pivetti has also often been referred to as “chairwoman” (主席) of ICFA on third party sites. Regardless of their exact titles, both individuals have maintained important leadership roles in the organization. For examples of the differing titles, see Yang Le, “When ‘the most Chinese’ meets ‘the most Italian,’” *Voice of Friendship*, no. 197, September 2019, available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20200104001213/https://cpaffc.org.cn:443/public/uploads/en/file/201910/7be08f038a0d4f2a8787f997615173ff.pdf>; Antonio Brichetto, “Accordo con la provincia di Shandong [Agreement with the Province of Shandong],” Italy-China Friendship Association, May 28, 2018, available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20200104012844/https://www.icfa.eu/2018/05/28/accordo-con-la-provincia-di-shandong/>; and 李建平 [Li Jianping], “李建平副会长在意大利对华友好协会成立大会上的致辞 [Vice-President Li Jianping's Speech at the Establishment Ceremony of the Italy-China Friendship Association].”

81 “Presentazione icfa in cina [Presentation of ICFA in China],” Italy-China Friendship Association. This source includes a photo of Pivetti addressing the audience during this event at CPAFFC headquarters.

82 Contradictory information exists on ICFA's specific founding year. It is likely either 2012 or 2013, given the official inauguration of the group in 2013.

83 “Inauguration of ICFA in Rome,” Italy-China Friendship Association, June 22, 2013, available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20200103171334/https://www.icfa.eu/2013/06/22/inaugurazione-icfa-a-roma/>.

84 “Italy-China Friendship Association inaugurated in Rome,” *Xinhua*, People.cn, June 23, 2013, available at <http://en.people.cn/90883/8295399.html>. This source includes a photo of Pivetti shaking hands with Li Jianping during the ceremony after formally signing the agreement. For information on Chinese officials and media who attended, see “Presentazione icfa in cina [Presentation of ICFA in China],” Italy-China Friendship Association.

85 李建平 [Li Jianping], “李建平副会长在意大利对华友好协会成立大会上的致辞 [Vice-President Li Jianping's Speech at the Establishment Ceremony of the Italy-China Friendship Association].”

These events cast doubt that ICFA is an organization organically formed by Italian citizens seeking to develop connections with China and raise questions about the extent of the CPAFFC's involvement in founding and directing this Italian organization.<sup>86</sup> Indeed, Pivetti's own website states that ICFA is "the Italian branch of the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries."<sup>87</sup>

ICFA's website states that one of its three main tasks is "comprehensive strategic cooperation with the CPAFFC."<sup>88</sup> Although the website states that such strategic cooperation is in relation to the establishment of sister cities, the CCP's aims of such cooperation far exceed the local municipal-level issues that are traditionally pursued through sister city arrangements.<sup>89</sup> ICFA's other primary goals are to facilitate exchanges of various types and to provide a platform for business and economic relations between the two countries.<sup>90</sup>

Through ICFA's work to develop economic and cultural ties between China and Italy, Pivetti has attempted to use ICFA to shift Italian perceptions of China. Over the last two decades, negative views of China's economic impact on Italy have increased, as small-scale artisan manufacturers were forced out of business by competitive large-scale manufacturers in China. More recently, some Italians have criticized Chinese investment in new factories in Italy, claiming that the factories favor Chinese workers, evade taxes, and disregard labor laws.<sup>91</sup> In this context, Pivetti visited Chinese businesses in the city of Padua in 2015 and, in an interview with a Chinese-language media outlet, she stated that the majority of Chinese operate within the law. She argued that misunderstandings have arisen due to "insufficient communication and a lack of exchanges between Chinese society and the [Italian]

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86 Other Chinese friendship organizations such as the one in the Czech Republic discussed below, claim to be formed independent of Chinese government influence.

87 "Nasce Italy China Friendship Association, una grande opportunità per gli scambi culturali ed economici tra Italia e Cina [The Italy-China Friendship Association Is Born, a Great Opportunity for Cultural and Economic Exchange between Italy and China]," available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20200103162534/https://www.irenepivetti.it/news/174-nasce-italy-china-friendship-association-una-grande-opportunita-per-gli-scambi-culturali-ed-economici-tra-italia-e-cina>.

88 "Chi Siamo [Who We Are]," Italy-China Friendship Association, available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20191220225924/https://www.icfa.eu/chi-siamo/>.

89 As part of at least some sister city agreements, the CPAFFC has insisted on the inclusion of language on national-level foreign policy, in particular that Taiwan be regarded as part of the People's Republic of China. If local governments later object to this language, the CCP then seeks to use the benefits of the sister city agreement as leverage, threatening to suspend or cancel various arrangements. For example, consider China's response when the Prague municipal government objected to a clause on the PRC's One China policy in its sister city agreement with Beijing: Marc Santora, "The Broken Promise of a Panda."

90 "Chi Siamo [Who We Are]," Italy-China Friendship Association.

91 Peter S. Goodman and Emma Bubola, "The Chinese Roots of Italy's Far-Right Rage," *The New York Times*, December 5, 2019, available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/05/business/italy-china-far-right.html> and D.T. Max, "The Chinese Workers Who Assemble Designer Bags in Tuscany," *The New Yorker*, April 16, 2018, available at <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2018/04/16/the-chinese-workers-who-assemble-designer-bags-in-tuscany>.

government and mainstream society.”<sup>92</sup> Pivetti then expressed hope that ICFA could “play the role of a bridge in promoting exchanges between Chinese society and the government and local commercial organizations, thereby...deepening understanding, deepening friendship, and jointly developing [economically].”<sup>93</sup>

#### FIGURE 4: CPAFFC OFFICIALS MEET WITH IRENE PIVETTI AND LUANA WANG



ICFA President Irene Pivetti (fourth from left) and ICFA Secretary General Luana Wang (fifth from left) with CPAFFC Vice President Li Jianping (third from left) and the head of the CPAFFC's Department of European and Asian Affairs, Director-General Song Jingwu (second from left), during a January 2014 meeting.<sup>94</sup>

Pivetti's efforts to shape Italian opinion extend far beyond the role of overseas Chinese communities in Italy, to include defending controversial CCP policies, particularly on human rights, sovereignty issues, and the Belt and Road Initiative. In one video interview with Italian media in October 2018, Pivetti defends the inhumane detention of Uighurs in Xinjiang. She first argues for evaluating national counterterrorism policies on a relativistic basis, stating that “countries need to formulate corresponding counter-terrorism measures

92 “意大利前政要考察帕多瓦华人商贸区 首肯华商贡献 [Former Italian Political Leader Visits Padua Chinese Business District Approves of the Contributions of Chinese Businesses],” 中国侨网 [*Overseas Chinese Online*], October 19, 2015, available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20200104194150/http://www.chinaqw.com/hqhr/2015/10-19/67476.shtml>.

93 Ibid.

94 “李建平副会长会见意大利对华友好协会主席 [Vice President Li Jianping Meets with the Chairperson of the Italy China Friendship Association],” The Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries, January 14, 2014, available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20200526234919/https://cpaffc.org.cn/index/news/detail/id/2105/lang/1.html>.

according to their own conditions.”<sup>95</sup> Pivetti then claims that, in counterterrorism, “China’s achievements are worth celebrating” and “the Chinese government has found and operates a reasonable and efficient anti-terrorism policy...especially in Xinjiang.”<sup>96</sup>

When asked about China’s deradicalization efforts, which include the detention of perhaps over one million Uighur civilians, she claims that “deradicalization...measures have played a positive role in curbing the spread of terrorism.”<sup>97</sup> She stresses that China’s approach is based on laws and regulations and that “through reform and education by political personnel, the spread of extremism is prevented.”<sup>98</sup> Pivetti asserts that the CCP’s “control measures are reasonable, their rules of law are in line with the people’s condition, and the people’s right of development is guaranteed.”<sup>99</sup> One day after the video’s release on an Italian news site, the video and a Chinese translation of the interview were posted on the website of Beijing-based EZTV. The EZTV video displays the EZTV logo, indicating that it may have been broadcast on the television station itself, which caters to overseas Chinese across Europe.<sup>100</sup>

Pivetti’s response to the Milan City Council’s plan to bestow the title of “honorary citizen” on the Dalai Lama in 2016 was another telling sign of her role as a CCP surrogate. Pivetti “expressed regret over the Milan City Council’s irrational decision and called on [Italian] society to maintain the development of Sino-Italian friendly relations,” according to an article posted on a Chinese-language news website for overseas Chinese in Italy.<sup>101</sup> In yet another example, in response to critical remarks by a U.S. government official regarding

95 Irene Pivetti, “Antiterrorismo e diritti umani, l’intervista a Irene Pivetti [Counter-terrorism and Human Rights, the Interview with Irene Pivetti],” Interview by Antonio Bandinu, *TRC Giornale*, October 12, 2018, available at <https://trcgiornale.it/antiterrorismo-lintervista-a-irene-pivetti/> and Irene Pivetti, “意大利前国家众议院议长Irene Pivetti就反恐与人权接受欧洲华文电视台专访 [Former President of the Italian Chamber of Deputies Irene Pivetti Accepts an Interview Regarding Counter-terrorism and Human Rights with a European Chinese Language Television Station],” Interview by Antonio Bandinu, 欧洲新闻网 [EZTV], October 13, 2018, available at <http://www.eztv.vip/news/guoj/2018/1013/3048.html>.

96 Ibid.

97 Ibid.

98 Ibid.

99 Ibid.

100 Irene Pivetti, “意大利前国家众议院议长Irene Pivetti就反恐与人权接受欧洲华文电视台专访 [Former President of the Italian Chamber of Deputies Irene Pivetti Accepts an Interview Regarding Counter-terrorism and Human Rights with a European Chinese Language Television Station].” Note that the written Chinese language translation is out of order in some sections. For more on EZTV, see <http://www.eztv.vip/about/aboutus/>.

101 “意大利侨界抗议米兰市议会授予达赖‘荣誉市民’称号 [Italy’s Ethnic Chinese Protest Milan City Council’s Awarding of the Dalai Lama with ‘Honorary Citizenship’],” 意大利新闻网 [Italy News Network], October 14, 2016, available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20200103194833/https://xinwen.hao0039.com/yidalizhongwenxinwen/oulianwang/2016/1014/103792.html>. No media outlet seems to have published specific remarks by Pivetti on this issue, calling into question what she may have actually said. Regardless, this instance shows how Chinese media uses coopted foreigners to support CCP policy positions. Interestingly, one source claims that Pivetti, while serving as President of the Chamber of Deputies, actually met the Dalai Lama in 1994. See *His Holiness the XIV Dalai Lama of Tibet*, (Dharamshala: Central Tibetan Administration Department of Information and International Relations, 2014), available at [https://web.archive.org/web/20200103195031/https://tibet.net/wp-content/uploads/2005/01/Souvenir-Book\\_Final.pdf](https://web.archive.org/web/20200103195031/https://tibet.net/wp-content/uploads/2005/01/Souvenir-Book_Final.pdf).

Italy's intention to formally join the BRI, the *Global Times* published an article in March 2019 defending Italy's decision. Attempting to demonstrate Italian backing for China's initiative, the article invoked Pivetti's support to BRI by prominently featuring a photo of her delivering remarks at a 2018 BRI summit.<sup>102</sup> At that event, Pivetti praised the initiative and stated her belief that "the BRI will be greater than the Great Wall."<sup>103</sup> Such examples illustrate how the CCP takes the liberty of using the name, image, and previous remarks of foreign cooptees to respond to foreign criticism.

Complementary to her role with ICFA, Pivetti has furthered the CCP's united front objectives, especially for the Belt and Road Initiative, through her other business ventures. Pivetti is the founder and president of Only Italia, a consortium that promotes trade between China and Italy, especially Italian exports to China.<sup>104</sup> Through Only Italia, Pivetti has promoted BRI projects, and sought Italian investors to support logistics infrastructure investments to support rail transport between Italy and China.<sup>105</sup> Rail infrastructure and transport are a major component of the BRI.

Pivetti is open about her role in advancing BRI. In a December 2018 interview about her China-related work, Pivetti stated: "I work with local institutions, *mainly with the communist party* [emphasis added], focusing on the Belt Road Initiative because the Chinese want me to revive industrial parks and trading activities... therefore we agreed to launch this Italy-China train."<sup>106</sup> Yet in the interview she notes her frustration as she was unable to find an Italian operator to run a train directly from Italy to China: "What upsets me is that no Italian operator is either able or willing to provide an Italy-China direct train, thus leaving this business to Russian and German companies." She continued, "I am deeply sad and frustrated because I have been working on this project night and day with all the company's staff, and in 6 weeks I travelled back and forth to China every 10 days."<sup>107</sup>

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102 "White House's criticism of Italy's plan to join BRI ridiculous: Chinese FM," *Global Times*, March 6, 2019, available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20200103172729/http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1141188.shtml>.

103 "共话合作发展 2018“一带一路”工商领袖峰会在西博城召开 [Discussing Cooperative Development 2018 Belt and Road Initiative Business Leaders Summit Convened in Western China International Expo City]," 凤凰网四川 [*Phoenix Online Sichuan*], September 21, 2018, available at [https://web.archive.org/web/20200104051128/http://sc.ifeng.com/a/20180921/6901153\\_o.shtml](https://web.archive.org/web/20200104051128/http://sc.ifeng.com/a/20180921/6901153_o.shtml).

104 "Homepage," Only Italia, available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20191220225824/https://www.only-italia.it/en/>.

105 "Irene Pivetti a palazzo Galli: 'Logistica ponte ideale verso la Cina, ma bisogna investire' [Irene Pivetti at Palazzo Galli: 'Ideal Logistics Bridge to China, but Investment Is Necessary']," Only Italia, September 20, 2019, available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20191220225849/https://www.only-italia.it/irene-pivetti-a-palazzo-galli-logistica-ponte-ideale-verso-la-cina-ma-bisogna-investire/>.

106 Angelo Scorza, "Pivetti fighting for Italy-China trade logistics: 'Italian operators had better wake up before Germans and Russians take control of the entire business,'" *Ship2Shore*, December 17, 2018, available at [http://www.ship2shore.it/en/logistics/pivetti-fighting-for-italy-china-trade-logistics-italian-operators-had-better-wake-up-before\\_69399.htm](http://www.ship2shore.it/en/logistics/pivetti-fighting-for-italy-china-trade-logistics-italian-operators-had-better-wake-up-before_69399.htm).

107 Ibid.



This interview is extraordinary because Pivetti explicitly states that she worked at the direction of local Chinese Communist Party officials and she draws a rare, direct link between the CCP's guidance and her own actions. Yet, she shrewdly argued that her goal was to enhance Italy's leverage over foreign companies that would be bidding for such a project. By Pivetti's telling, an Italy-China direct train was needed not because the CCP asked her to implement it, but because Italians needed to stop letting European competitors dominate this aspect of the freight business.

This interview also raises questions about how Pivetti's work was funded. She apparently lacked Italian financial support to implement this BRI rail link. Yet, she seemingly had the resources to conduct this work for over a year, including frequent travel to China. In a separate May 2019 media interview, when asked how much money she made in China, Pivetti responded, "if you invest a lot, you earn a lot. I have invested a lot."<sup>108</sup>

Pivetti's statements, which suggest that Chinese Communist Party officials are one of her primary business partners and that she has become wealthy from her China-related work, raise potential conflict of interest questions given Pivetti's repeated campaigns for elected office. In 2013 she vied for a position in the Lazio regional elections<sup>109</sup> and in 2016 she ran as a candidate in the Rome municipal elections.<sup>110</sup> In 2018, she founded a new political party, Italia Madre.<sup>111</sup> In early 2019, without closing Italia Madre, Pivetti joined Forza Italia, the party of former Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, and unsuccessfully campaigned for a seat in the May 2019 European Parliament elections.<sup>112</sup>

ICFA also serves as a platform for the formation of new united front groups and collaboration among existing united front groups. In October 2019, as President of ICFA, Pivetti signed a memorandum of cooperation between ICFA and the Silk Road Planning Research

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<sup>108</sup> Irene Pivetti, "Irene Pivetti: 'Con Forza Italia voglio costruire l'Eurasia' [Irene Pivetti: With Forza Italia I Want to Build Eurasia]," Interview by Luca Telese, *Panorama*, May 9, 2019, available at <https://www.panorama.it/news/politica/irene-pivetti-forza-italia-europee-lega-candidata/>.

<sup>109</sup> Matteo Legnani, "Torna la Pivetti Alle regionali capolista in Lazio con Baccini [Pivetti Returns as the Lead Candidate on the Regional Electoral List in Lazio for Baccini]," *Libero*, January 27, 2013, available at <https://www.liberoquotidiano.it/news/personaggi/1170072/Torna-la-Pivetti--Alle-regionali--capolista-in-Lazio--con-Baccini.html>.

<sup>110</sup> Tommaso Ciriaco, "Il ritorno di Irene Pivetti, candidata a Roma: Salvini ha salvato la Lega [The Return of Irene Pivetti, Candidate in Rome: Salvini Saved the League]," *la Repubblica*, May 5, 2016, available at [https://www.repubblica.it/politica/2016/05/05/news/il\\_ritorno\\_di\\_ireni\\_pivetti\\_candidata\\_a\\_roma\\_salvini\\_ha\\_salvato\\_la\\_lega\\_bossi\\_l\\_aveva\\_quasi\\_uccisa-139121148/](https://www.repubblica.it/politica/2016/05/05/news/il_ritorno_di_ireni_pivetti_candidata_a_roma_salvini_ha_salvato_la_lega_bossi_l_aveva_quasi_uccisa-139121148/).

<sup>111</sup> Angelo Scorza, "Pivetti fighting for Italy-China trade logistics."

<sup>112</sup> Irene Pivetti, "Irene Pivetti: 'Con Forza Italia voglio costruire l'Eurasia' [Irene Pivetti: With Forza Italia I Want to Build Eurasia]." See also "Elezioni europee 2019, capilista e candidati nella circoscrizione Nord-Est [European Elections 2019, List Leaders and Candidates in the North-East Constituency]," *il Fatto Quotidiano*, May 20, 2019, available at <https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2019/05/20/elezioni-europee-2019-capilista-e-candidati-nella-circoscrizione-nord-est/5183553/>.

Center<sup>113</sup>, a think tank dedicated to the Belt and Road Initiative<sup>114</sup> and overseen by the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, the party's highest-level united front organization.<sup>115</sup> The memorandum is intended to “expand and deepen pragmatic cooperation between China and Italy in investment, trade, industry, the humanities, and other fields under the Belt and Road Initiative guiding framework.”<sup>116</sup> This agreement is another example of Pivetti's efforts to support the BRI.<sup>117</sup> Underscoring the interlocking nature of the united front institutions that China is employing in Europe, Li Xiaolin is the Executive Vice

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- 113 “丝路规划研究中心和意大利对华友好协会 签署合作备忘录 [The Silk Road Planning Research Center and the Italy-China Friendship Association Sign a Memorandum of Cooperation],” 人民政协网 [Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference Online], available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20200410182731/http://www.rmzxb.com.cn/c/2019-10-29/2453365.shtml>.
- 114 “中心簡介和宗旨 [Center Introduction and Objectives],” 絲綢之路經濟發展研究中心 [Silk Road Economic Development Research Center], available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20191220224949/https://www.silkroadresearch.org/introduction-and-mission?lang=zh>.
- 115 Peter Mattis, Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation Research Fellow, *China's Digital Authoritarianism: Surveillance, Influence, and Political Control*, Testimony before the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, May 16, 2019, available at <https://docs.house.gov/meetings/IG/IG00/20190516/109462/HRG-116-IG00-Wstate-MattisP-20190516.pdf>.
- 116 “丝路规划研究中心和意大利对华友好协会 签署合作备忘录 [The Silk Road Planning Research Center and the Italy-China Friendship Association Sign a Memorandum of Cooperation],” 人民政协网 [Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference Online]. This ICFA agreement is consistent with Pivetti's years of extensive work in support of BRI through her private companies, including Only Italia and Lobby Communication Advisory. For more information on such work, see Angelo Scorza, “Pivetti fighting for Italy-China trade logistics”; “Irene Pivetti a palazzo Galli: ‘Logistica ponte ideale verso la Cina, ma bisogna investire’ [Irene Pivetti at Palazzo Galli: ‘Ideal Logistics Bridge to China, but Investment Is Necessary’],” Only Italia; “Follow the New Silk Road: China's growing trail of think tanks and lobbyists in Europe,” Corporate Europe Observatory, August 4, 2019, available at <https://corporateeurope.org/en/2019/04/follow-new-silk-road-chinas-growing-trail-think-tanks-and-lobbyists-europe>; and “Irene Pivetti, Beijing's friend in Rome,” *Intelligence Online*, February 20, 2019, available at <https://www.intelligenceonline.com/corporate-intelligence/2019/02/20/irene-pivetti-beijing-s-friend-in-rome,108345618-art>.
- 117 This agreement, as well as others involving technological issues, also indicate that Pivetti may be involved in facilitating technology transfer from Italy to China. As one example, in September 2017, Pivetti, acting as head of her private company, Lobby Communication Advisory, signed a cooperation agreement with Xi'an Jiaotong University's Shanghai Academy, a research institute dedicated to foreign technology transfer. See “西安交通大学上海研究院与意大利LCA战略咨询公司签订合作协议 [Xi'an Jiaotong University Shanghai Academy and Italy's Lobby Communications Advisory Strategy Consulting Firm Sign a Cooperation Agreement],” 西安交通大学上海研究院 [Xi'an Jiaotong University Shanghai Academy], September 16, 2017, available at [http://web.archive.org/web/20200410191354/http://www.xjtu-sh.cn/news\\_view.aspx?TypeId=4&Id=484&Fid=t2%3A4%3A2](http://web.archive.org/web/20200410191354/http://www.xjtu-sh.cn/news_view.aspx?TypeId=4&Id=484&Fid=t2%3A4%3A2); “技术转移中心 [Technology Transfer Center],” 西安交通大学上海研究院 [Xi'an Jiaotong University Shanghai Academy], available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20200410191708/http://www.xjtu-sh.cn/recruitment.aspx?TypeId=135&Fid=t6:135:6>; “配套服务 [Comprehensive Service],” 西安交通大学上海研究院 [Xi'an Jiaotong University Shanghai Academy], <http://web.archive.org/web/20200410191821/http://www.xjtu-sh.cn/recruitment.aspx?TypeId=136&Fid=t6%3A136%3A6>; and “离岸创新中心 [Offshore Innovation Center],” 西安交通大学上海研究院 [Xi'an Jiaotong University Shanghai Academy], available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20200410191839/http://www.xjtu-sh.cn/recruitment.aspx?TypeId=134&Fid=t6:134:6>. In another example, Pivetti was involved in establishing a “Sino-Italian Technology and Commerce Cooperation Platform” in Beijing in September 2019, see “La ‘piattaforma di cooperazione tecnologica e commerciale di Zhongyi’ si è stabilita nello Zhongguancun Hangxing Park a Pechino [The ‘Zhongyi Technology and Trade Cooperation Platform’ Has Been Established in Zhongguancun Hangxing Park in Beijing],” Only Italia, September 11, 2019, available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20191220225156/https://www.only-italia.it/la-piattaforma-di-cooperazione-tecnologica-e-commerciale-di-zhongyi-si-e-stabilita-nello-zhongguancun-hangxing-park-a-pechino/>.

Chairman of the Silk Road Planning Research Center, a position which, until recently, she held concurrently with her role as president of the CPAFFC.<sup>118</sup>

In July 2019, Pivetti formally appointed several prominent overseas Italian-Chinese individuals to leadership positions in ICFA, a move which more closely integrates the CCP's existing united front influence operations in Italy. Notably, Ji Zhihai became executive chairman of ICFA.<sup>119</sup> Ji, born in Zhejiang province in 1965, moved to Italy in 1986 and entered the restaurant business. He is concurrently vice chairman of the Zhejiang Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese (ZFROC),<sup>120</sup> and from 2003 to 2018, he was a member of the Zhejiang Province Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference.<sup>121</sup> Both of these organizations are closely involved in united front work. ZFROC, headquartered in Zhejiang's capital of Hangzhou, is a provincial-level organization under the All-China Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese (AFROC).<sup>122</sup> AFROC, including its provincial-level units, is "a people's organization" composed of returned overseas Chinese and serves as a "bridge and a link" between overseas Chinese and the Chinese party-state.<sup>123</sup> AFROC is dedicated in part to advancing China's development through relationships with overseas Chinese and returned Chinese emigrants, protecting the rights of overseas Chinese, and ensuring that overseas Chinese remain politically loyal to the CCP.<sup>124</sup> AFROC is administratively under the Chinese People's Political Consultative Congress.

The month after Ji's appointment, Ji led an ICFA delegation to China to meet with Wang Xiaorong, the head of the Lishui Municipal Party Committee's United Front Work Department. During the meeting, Ji reportedly stated that the Belt and Road Initiative has become the "core" of ICFA's work and that ICFA has accepted overseas Chinese members to support related bilateral exchanges. Tellingly, Wang expressed hope that collaboration with ICFA would help

118 "Executive Vice Chairman of the Silk Road Planning Research Center LI Xiaolin visits RUC," Renmin University of China, May 7, 2018, available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20191220225127/https://www.ruc.edu.cn/archives/32079>.

119 "意大利侨领加盟对华友好协会 冀加强中意交流 [Italian Overseas Chinese Leader Joins Chinese Friendship Association Hope for Strengthening China-Italy Exchanges]," 中国新闻网 [*China News Service*], July 23, 2019, available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20200210040128/https://www.chinanews.com/hr/2019/07-23/8904162.shtml>

120 "领导介绍 [Leadership Introduction]," 浙江省归国华侨联合会 [Zhejiang Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese], available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20200104022329/http://www.zjsql.com.cn/index.php?m=content&c=index&a=lists&catid=45>.

121 谢庆 [Xie Qing], "季志海: '独闯'意大利 | 致敬改革·侨·40人 [Ji Zhihai: 'Independently Broke into' Italy | Paying Respect to Reform -Overseas Chinese·40 People]," 浙商杂志 [*Zhe Shang Magazine*], Sohu, available at [https://web.archive.org/web/20200104022345/https://www.sohu.com/a/276658312\\_146174](https://web.archive.org/web/20200104022345/https://www.sohu.com/a/276658312_146174).

122 "中华全国归国华侨联合会章程 [Constitution of the All-China Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese]," 浙江省归国华侨联合会 [Zhejiang Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese], available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20200210043305/http://www.zjsql.com.cn/index.php?m=content&c=index&a=lists&catid=43>.

123 "中国侨联简况 [Overview of All-China Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese]," 中华全国归国华侨联合会 [All-China Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese], June 22, 2018, available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20200210050002/http://www.chinaql.org/n1/2018/0622/c419629-30075909.html>.

124 Ibid.

in “producing a favorable public opinion atmosphere” for the Belt and Road Initiative and in “actively creating an international environment beneficial for China’s development.”<sup>125</sup>

To date, ICFA’s overall success appears mixed. The very creation of ICFA is notable, particularly the CPAFFC’s apparent role in birthing the group in Beijing and in appointing Pivetti as the group’s coopted leader. Since 2013, the work of ICFA and Pivetti has been successful to the extent that it established new partnerships, platforms, relationships, or groupings between Italian and PRC-based organizations. This work appears to be most productive in economic areas, especially for trade, technology transfer, and, to some extent, BRI-related initiatives.

Yet, ICFA and Pivetti have been less successful in changing national-level policy and shifting public and elite discourse on China. Although the Italian government signed a BRI memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the Chinese government, which signaled a potential shift in Italian policy toward China, ICFA does not appear to be responsible for that development and a new Italian government is now rebalancing Italy’s relationship with China. The signing of the MOU also brought disappointing results. Promises of meaningful investments remain largely unfulfilled and could potentially adversely impact Italian perceptions of China. Pivetti has unsuccessfully run for elected office multiple times. Nevertheless, Pivetti’s persistent aspiration for political office and ICFA’s innovative attempts to expand its network, such as through Ji Zhihai’s recent appointment, necessitate continued monitoring of the group’s attempts to influence Italian politics and society.

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125 “丽水统战部长晤意对华友协代表团 促友好交流合作 [Head of the Lishui United Front Work Department Meets with Italy-China Friendship Association Delegation Promote Friendly Exchanges and Cooperation],” 欧联网 [*Olian News Online*], August 19, 2019, available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20200103193405/http://www.oliannews.com/hr/2019/08-19/298447.shtml>.

## CHAPTER 5

# The Czech-China Chamber of Collaboration

The Chinese Communist Party has invested time and effort in coopting elites in the Czech Republic through a variety of political, economic, and social organizations, and the Czech Republic may be one of the clearest examples of the CCP's elite cooption in Europe to date. Elite cooption may in part explain the dramatic shift in the Czech Republic's foreign policy since 2013, from one of China's harshest critics in Europe on human rights and Tibet to one of Europe's most eager partners for Chinese trade, investment, and political relations.<sup>126</sup> The Czech-China Chamber of Collaboration<sup>127</sup> (hereafter, the Chamber)<sup>128</sup> appears to be one of the organizations at the center of the CCP's recent efforts to expand influence in the country.<sup>129</sup> While other PRC-based entities have had major roles in elite cooption in the Czech Republic, particularly the Chinese conglomerate CEFC China Energy, this case study focuses specifically on the role of the Chamber as a front organization.<sup>130</sup>

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126 Martin Hála, "United Front Work by Other Means: China's 'Economic Diplomacy' in Central and Eastern Europe," *China Brief* 19, No. 9 May 9, 2019, available at <https://jamestown.org/program/united-front-work-by-other-means-chinas-economic-diplomacy-in-central-and-eastern-europe/>.

127 The Chamber's name is directly translated from Czech as the "Mixed Czech-Chinese Chamber of Mutual Cooperation." See Olga Lomová, Jichang Lulu, and Martin Hála, "Bilateral dialogue with the PRC at both ends: Czech-Chinese 'friendship' extends to social credit," *Sinopsis*, July 28, 2019, available at <https://sinopsis.cz/en/friendship-and-social-credit/>.

128 The Chamber appears to be separate from another CPAFFC-affiliated friendship association, the "China-Czech Friendship Association (中国捷克友好协会)," which was founded in 1958. That organization's Chinese name differs from the Chamber's Chinese name, which is directly translated as the "Czech-China Friendship Cooperation Association (捷中友好合作协会)." "中国捷克友好协会 [China-Czech Friendship Association]," 中国人民对外友好协会 [The Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries], available at [https://web.archive.org/save/https://www.cpaffc.org.cn/index/xiehui/diquguobieyouxie\\_detail/id/14/lang/1.html](https://web.archive.org/save/https://www.cpaffc.org.cn/index/xiehui/diquguobieyouxie_detail/id/14/lang/1.html).

129 "Relations Between Political Elites and Pro-China Business," *Chinfluence*, updated October 8, 2018, available at <https://www.chinfluence.eu/czech-social-network-analysis/relations-between-political-elites-and-pro-china-business/>.

130 The direct translations from Czech to English in this report were performed with the assistance of machine translation.

The Chamber's stated mission is to "promote Czech-Chinese multi-lateral, multi-sectoral economic development,"<sup>131</sup> but its work includes a much more expansive range of activity, from developing local government relations<sup>132</sup> to facilitating visits by Chinese leaders, including Xi Jinping.<sup>133</sup> The Chamber claims it is a "naturally formed organization of individuals and business."<sup>134</sup> The Chamber held an establishment ceremony in 2011<sup>135</sup> and, like the Italy-China Friendship Association, the Chamber signed a cooperation agreement with the CPAFFC in 2012.<sup>136</sup> The Chamber's website continues to display a link to the CPAFFC website on each of its webpages.

The Chamber's creation owes much to the influence of PPF, an investment group established by a wealthy Czech citizen, and Home Credit, PPF's subsidiary.<sup>137</sup> PPF and Home Credit have been deeply involved in influence efforts to shift the Czech Republic's policy toward China and have used the Chamber as a means to that end. They sought to foster pro-China policies within the Czech government to convince Chinese regulators to allow Home Credit to enter China's domestic lending market.<sup>138</sup> At the Chamber's opening ceremony in 2011, aside

131 "友协使命 [Association Mission]," 捷中友好合作协会 [Czech-China Chamber of Collaboration], available at [https://web.archive.org/web/20191220231429/http://www.czechchina.com/?page\\_id=3052&lang=zh-hans](https://web.archive.org/web/20191220231429/http://www.czechchina.com/?page_id=3052&lang=zh-hans).

132 "Vice President Li Jianping Meets with Chairman of the Supervision Committee of the Czech-China Chamber of Collaboration," The Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries, March 28, 2013, available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20200527213154/https://cpaffc.org.cn/index/news/detail/id/5642/lang/2.html>.

133 "捷中友好协会会长: 捷方将以最高礼仪接待习主席 [President of the Czech-China Chamber of Collaboration: The Czech Side Will Use the Highest Etiquette to Receive Chairman Xi]," 央视新闻客户端 [CCTV], March 26, 2016, available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20191220231732/http://m.news.cntv.cn/2016/03/26/ARTILKK5XScXBkXfHyQmaFlF160326.shtml>. See also Fu Jing, "Czech Republic prepares for 'dream visit' by Xi," *China Daily*, March 27, 2016, available at [https://web.archive.org/web/20191220231805/http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2016xivisitzech/2016-03/27/content\\_24092413.htm](https://web.archive.org/web/20191220231805/http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2016xivisitzech/2016-03/27/content_24092413.htm).

134 "捷中友好合作协会成立仪式 [Czech-China Chamber of Collaboration Establishment Ceremony]," 捷中友好合作协会 [Czech-China Chamber of Collaboration], October 12, 2011, available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20191220231338/http://www.czechchina.com/?p=2903&lang=zh-hans>.

135 "捷中友好合作协会成立仪式 [Czech-China Chamber of Collaboration Establishment Ceremony]," 捷中友好合作协会 [Czech-China Chamber of Collaboration].

136 "Vice President Li Jianping Meets with Chairman," The Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries.

137 Martin Hála, "Náš krteček v Pekingu [Our Mole in Beijing]," *Sinopsis*, available at <https://sinopsis.cz/nas-krtecek-v-pekingu/>, previously published in *Lidové noviny*, May 17, 2014. Our thanks to Martin Hála for clarifying this point.

138 Home Credit had long pursued a license from PRC regulators to engage in consumer finance in China and Chinese officials told the company that the Czech government first needed to adopt pro-China policies. Home Credit then lobbied the Czech government, with Jaroslav Tvrdík's help, to adopt a friendlier policy toward China. With Zeman's election as president and the resulting shift in China policy, Home Credit received its license in 2014 and its lending in China became incredibly profitable in the following years. Dependent on the Chinese market, Home Credit has become embroiled in controversy again in late 2019 after a Czech media report exposed the company's secret public relations effort to cool rising anti-China sentiment in the Czech Republic, in part through inserting pro-China content in Czech media outlets and creating a pro-China media project, which misleadingly claimed to be independent. For more details, see Martin Hála, "Making Foreign Companies Serve China: Outsourcing Propaganda to Local Entities in the Czech Republic," *China Brief* 20, No. 1, January 17, 2020, available at <https://jamestown.org/program/making-foreign-companies-serve-china-outsourcing-propaganda-to-local-entities-in-the-czech-republic/> and Martin Hála and Jichang Lulu, "Lost in translation: 'Economic diplomacy' with Chinese characteristics," *Sinopsis*, March 11, 2019, available at <https://sinopsis.cz/en/lost-in-translation-economic-diplomacy-with-chinese-characteristics>.

from the Chamber's logo, the logos of PPF and Home Credit were the only ones prominently displayed on a standing banner, and a PPF Group shareholder, Jiří Šmejc,<sup>139</sup> was the only speaker at the event who was not affiliated with either the Chamber or the Czech or Chinese governments.<sup>140</sup> As noted above, the CPAFFC's ties with overseas local groups vary widely. In the case of ICFA in Italy, the CPAFFC was directly involved in the association's founding. In this instance, the Chamber's broad efforts to build relations between China and the Czech Republic brought it in contact with the CPAFFC.

The Chamber's original chairman was Jan Kohout, a former Czech Minister of Foreign Affairs. Shortly after the Chamber's founding, Kohout expressed hope that the Chamber's projects across business, culture, social, tourism, and youth issues would lead to "better, deeper mutual understanding and allow both sides to establish objective views that are not affected by outdated ideas and ideology."<sup>141</sup> In other words, Kohout wished to shed traditional Czech stances on Tibet and human rights in China in return for economic gain. Kohout later left the Chamber and, in September 2015, founded the New Silk Road Institute Prague, an organization that promoted China's foreign and economic policy goals, until the organization's closure in 2019. In one interview, Kohout described how his institute would advance the Belt and Road Initiative by identifying potential projects, including "highway, high-speed train and infrastructural prospects and also...soft projects."<sup>142</sup> On enlisting the Czech Republic's support for the China-led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), Kohout was clear on his intention to use the institute to influence legislators, stating "I will create positive atmosphere to keep this on government agenda to become part of AIIB. I will bring more arguments to keep it still alive and explain to experts, to the members of parliaments [sic]."<sup>143</sup>

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139 Jiří Šmejc later became Chairman and Director of Home Credit in 2012. In 2019, he became non-Executive Director and retained his position as Chairman. "Board of Directors," Home Credit, available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20200409173528/http://www.homecredit.net/about-us/corporate-governance/board-of-directors.aspx>.

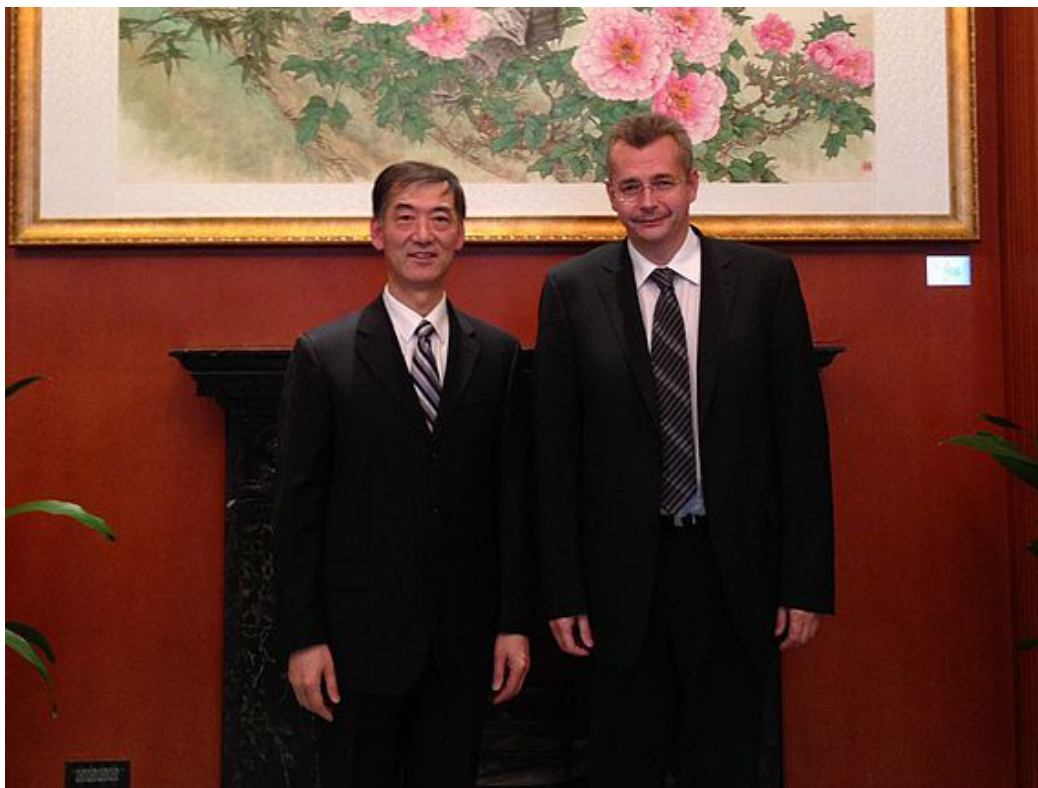
140 This source contains images from the Chamber's establishment ceremony in 2011 showing that PPF and Home Credit were the only organizations noted as supporters of the Chamber on the standing banners behind the speakers. "捷中友好合作协会成立仪式 [Czech-China Chamber of Collaboration Establishment Ceremony]," 捷中友好合作协会 [Czech-China Chamber of Collaboration].

141 "我们在建立战略性的长期合作项目 [We Are Establishing a Strategic Long-term Cooperation Program]," 捷中友好合作协会 [Czech-China Chamber of Collaboration], October 13, 2011, available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20191221045320/http://www.czechchina.com/?p=2900&lang=zh-hans>, previously published in *Deník Právo*, October 13, 2011.

142 By "soft projects," Kohout presumably means non-infrastructure projects, in fields such as culture, education, or sports. Fu Jing, "Aim of Belt and Road Initiative is to bring people together: Adviser to Czech president," *China Daily*, March 28, 2016, available at [https://web.archive.org/web/20191221045754/http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2016xixisitzech/2016-03/28/content\\_24137087.htm](https://web.archive.org/web/20191221045754/http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2016xixisitzech/2016-03/28/content_24137087.htm).

143 Ibid.

**FIGURE 5: JAROSLAV TVRDÍK MEETS WITH CPAFFC VICE PRESIDENT LI JIANPING IN MARCH 2013<sup>144</sup>**



Within the Chamber, Kohout's successor, Jaroslav Tvrdík, a former Czech Defense Minister, oversaw the rapid elevation of the Chamber's collaboration with Chinese groups and the Czech government. Tvrdík became Chairman of the Chamber in 2012,<sup>145</sup> after having been a lobbyist in China for PPF.<sup>146</sup> Tvrdík expanded the Chamber's activities, to include organizing an annual China Investment Forum for Czech and Chinese businessmen.<sup>147</sup>

144 "Vice President Li Jianping Meets with Chairman," The Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries.

145 Ivana Karásková, Tamás Matura, Richard Q. Turcsányi, and Matej Šimalčík, *Central Europe for Sale: The Politics of China's Influence*, National Endowment for Democracy, April 2018, available at [https://www.chinfluence.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/AMO\\_central-europe-for-sale-the-politics-of-chinese-influence-1.pdf](https://www.chinfluence.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/AMO_central-europe-for-sale-the-politics-of-chinese-influence-1.pdf).

146 Martin Hála, "A perfect storm brewing in Prague: President Xi in the land of Havel", *Visegrad Revue*, June 6, 2016, available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20191221045911/visegradrevue.eu/a-perfect-storm-brewing-in-prague-president-xi-in-the-land-of-havel/>.

147 "China Investment Forum 2013," Czech-China Chamber of Collaboration, available at [https://web.archive.org/web/20191221050133/http://www.czechchina.com/cif/?cif\\_year=2013-eng&lang=en](https://web.archive.org/web/20191221050133/http://www.czechchina.com/cif/?cif_year=2013-eng&lang=en).



The January 2013 election of Miloš Zeman as President of the Czech Republic led to a sea change that year in Czech-China foreign relations and a pathway for Tvrđík and the Chamber to rise in influence. Zeman and Tvrđík are both members of the Czech Social Democratic Party (ČSSD), in addition to being former members of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia.<sup>148</sup> In 2013, Zeman appointed Tvrđík as his personal advisor on China<sup>149</sup> and as advisor to the prime minister of the interim government.<sup>150</sup> In short, a former senior European government official working for an association linked to the CCP became an advisor to the leadership of a European country.

Despite the signing of a cooperation agreement between the two groups in 2012, the Chamber and the CPAFFC appear to have engaged each other actively only in the years that immediately followed. In a March 2013 meeting<sup>151</sup> with CPAFFC Vice President Li Jianping, Tvrđík conveyed that the ČSSD had close relations with the Chamber and that the ČSSD's leaders were enthusiastic about developing Sino-Czech friendship.<sup>152</sup> Some members of the ČSSD held pro-China views dating back to at least the mid-2000s<sup>153</sup> and the ČSSD's close involvement with the Chamber may have been by design. PPF may have created the Chamber to sustain non-mainstream pro-China politicians and officials until a more opportune time emerged for these figures to shape the Czech Republic's China policy.<sup>154</sup>

Tvrđík apparently made a concerted effort to build a close relationship with the CPAFFC through a series of meetings in 2014. In a January 2014 meeting with the CPAFFC, Tvrđík "introduced a series of arrangements by the Czech-China Chamber of Collaboration for strengthening...friendly and practical cooperation" between China and the Czech Republic and between the CPAFFC and the Chamber.<sup>155</sup>

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148 Likewise, Kohout was a member of the ČSSD and the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, but he has recently joined the Trikolora party. Our thanks to Martin Hála on this point.

149 Tvrđík's role as Zeman's advisor is technically an unofficial and unpaid position. See "Xi Jinping makes state visit to Prague," *The Economist Intelligence Unit*, April 4, 2016, available at <https://country.eiu.com/article.aspx?articleid=484088432&Country=Czech%20Republic&topic=Politics&subtopic=Forecast&subsubtopic=International+relations>. See also Barboza et al., "China Seeks Influence in Europe."

150 Martin Hála, "CEFC: Economic diplomacy with Chinese characteristics," *China Digital Times*, February 8, 2018, available at <https://chinadigitaltimes.net/2018/02/martin-hala-cefc-ccp-influence-eastern-europe/>.

151 For earlier coverage of the connection between the Chamber and the CPAFFC and of Tvrđík's March 2013 and February 2014 meetings with the CPAFFC, see Olga Lomová et al., "Bilateral dialogue with the PRC at both ends."

152 "Vice President Li Jianping Meets with Chairman," The Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries.

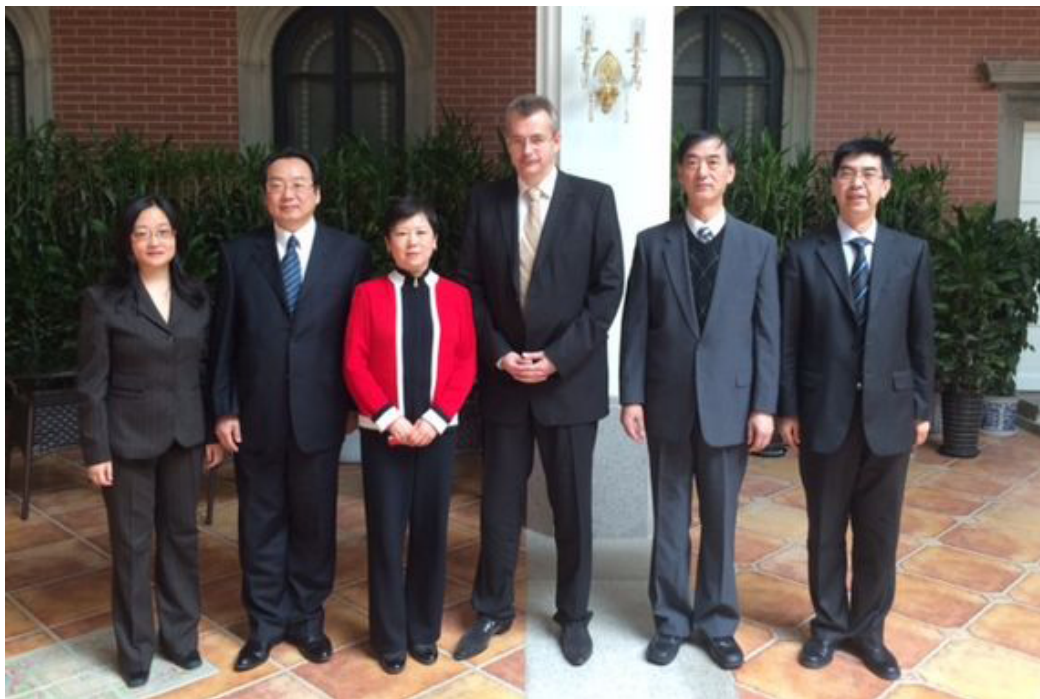
153 Hála, "A perfect storm."

154 Hála, "Náš krteček v Pekingu [Our Mole in Beijing]."

155 "李建平副会长会见捷中友好合作协会监事会主席、捷克前国防部长德沃吉克 [Vice President Li Jianping Meets with Chairman of the Supervision Committee of the Czech-China Chamber of Collaboration, Former Czech Minister of Defense Tvrđík]," 中国人民对外友好协会 [The Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries], January 15, 2014, available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20200408042253/https://www.epaffc.org.cn/index/news/detail/id/194/lang/1.html>.

Tvrđík communicated the Czech government's China policy to the CPAFFC's leadership, including in a February 2014 meeting in China with then-CPAFFC President Li Xiaolin, Li Jianping, and the head of the CPAFFC's Department of European and Asian Affairs, Director-General Song Jingwu. Tvrđík described how “strengthening the cooperation with China was on the table of the first Cabinet meeting after the new government has [sic] just established.”<sup>156</sup>

**FIGURE 6: TVRĐÍK MEETS WITH CPAFFC OFFICIALS IN CHINA IN FEBRUARY 2014**



Tvrđík meets with then-CPAFFC President Li Xiaolin, Li Jianping, and the head of the CPAFFC's Department of European and Asian Affairs, Director-General Song Jingwu during a February 2014 meeting in China<sup>157</sup>

At yet another meeting in 2014 between Tvrđík and Li Jianping, Li stated that Tvrđík “in recent years has had inseparably close cooperation with the CPAFFC in various aspects, including culture, economics, and business.”<sup>158</sup> Tvrđík reciprocated by calling the CPAFFC an “important cooperative partner” and stating that the Chamber and the CPAFFC “have

156 Ibid.

157 “President Li Xiaolin Meets with Chairman of the Supervision Committee of Czech-China Chamber of Collaboration,” The Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries, February 14, 2014, available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20200122223810/https://cpaffc.org.cn/index/news/detail/id/5675/lang/2.html>.

158 “李建平副会长会见捷中友好合作协会主席德沃吉克 [Vice President Li Jianping Meets with Chairman Tvrđík of the Czech-China Chamber of Collaboration],” 中国人民对外友好协会 [The Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries], November 26, 2014, available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20200408042223/https://cpaffc.org.cn/index/news/detail/id/2199/lang/1.html>.

developed many rich and pragmatic projects” over several years.<sup>159</sup> While Tvrđík and the CPAFFC met a number of times in 2014, the two sides seem to have met infrequently since then, at least based on CPAFFC press releases.<sup>160</sup>

Beyond building national-level relations between the Czech Republic and China, Tvrđík made clear that the Chamber also sought to facilitate and strengthen the CCP’s relationships both at the local level within the Czech Republic and at the national and local levels with other European countries. In September 2014, in his capacity as chairman of the Chamber, Tvrđík met with the Beijing People’s Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries (BPAFFC),<sup>161</sup> and pledged that “the Chamber was willing to establish a long-term cooperative partnership<sup>162</sup> with the BPAFFC.”<sup>163</sup> He stated that the Czech Republic “was willing to actively assist China in promoting all-around friendly cooperative relations with the 15 other Central and Eastern European countries.”<sup>164</sup> Finally, Tvrđík said that the Chamber “was willing to assist Beijing in establishing friendly relations with Prague and other

159 Ibid. In 2014, Tvrđík and Li Jianping participated in an event in which the Chamber donated hospital beds and 20,000 Euros to the Beijing Children’s Hospital. See “李建平副会长出席捷中合作协会向北京儿童医院捐赠病床仪式 [Vice President Li Jianping Attends Ceremony for the Donation of Hospital Beds by the Czech-China Chamber of Collaboration to Beijing Children’s Hospital],” 中国人民对外友好协会 [The Chinese People’s Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries], June 18, 2014, available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20200408042238/https://cpaffc.org.cn/index/news/detail/id/2158/lang/1.html>.

160 In February 2017, Tvrđík met with Song Jingwu and others at the CPAFFC. Based on the CPAFFC press release, the two sides discussed issues in European politics. “CPAFFC Vice President Song Jingwu Meets with Chairman of the Supervision Committee of Czech-China Chamber of Collaboration Mr. Jaroslav Tvrđík,” 中国人民对外友好协会 [The Chinese People’s Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries], February 19, 2017, available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20200408035902/https://www.cpaffc.org.cn/index/news/detail/id/5804/lang/list.html>.

161 In addition to this September 2014 meeting, Tvrđík attended events with the BPAFFC on other occasions in October 2014 and November 2014. See “市友协为同仁堂走向欧洲牵线搭桥 [Beijing People’s Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries Mediates and Builds a Bridge for Tongrentang’s Move Toward Europe],” 北京市人民对外友好协会 [Beijing People’s Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries], October 29, 2014, available at [https://web.archive.org/web/20200409022157/http://www.bjyx.org.cn/portal/yxportal/articl.php?portal\\_id=12&column\\_id=67&content\\_id=662](https://web.archive.org/web/20200409022157/http://www.bjyx.org.cn/portal/yxportal/articl.php?portal_id=12&column_id=67&content_id=662) and “友协接待捷中友协主席及捷克卫生部官员 [Beijing People’s Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries Receives Chairman of the Czech-China Chamber of Collaboration and an Official of the Czech Ministry of Health],” 北京市人民对外友好协会 [Beijing People’s Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries], November 27, 2014, available at [https://web.archive.org/web/20200409021724/http://www.bjyx.org.cn/portal/yxportal/articl.php?portal\\_id=12&column\\_id=67&content\\_id=674](https://web.archive.org/web/20200409021724/http://www.bjyx.org.cn/portal/yxportal/articl.php?portal_id=12&column_id=67&content_id=674).

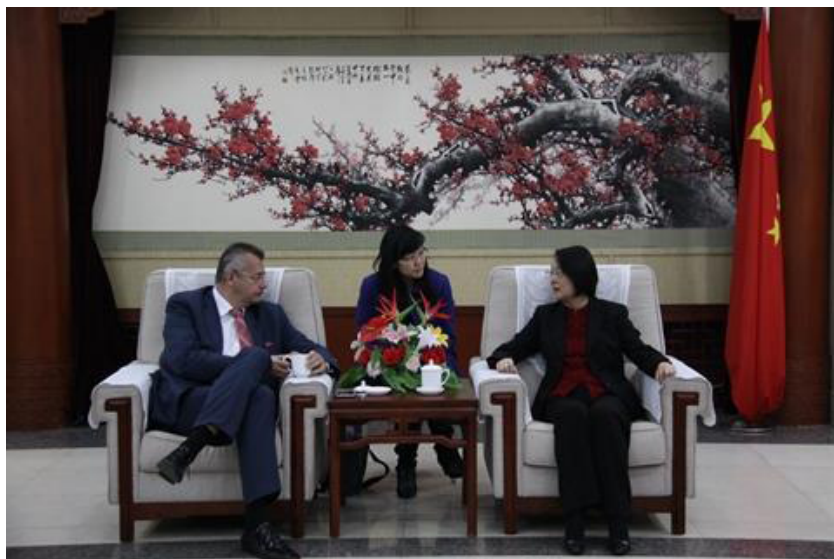
162 The Chamber and the BPAFFC had already signed a memorandum of cooperation in 2012, according to one BPAFFC publication. “市友协接待捷中友好合作协会主席 [Beijing People’s Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries Receives Chairman of the Czech-China Chamber of Collaboration],” 北京友协 [*Beijing People’s Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries*], No. 4, 2014, p. 12, available at [https://web.archive.org/web/20200410184943/www.bjyx.org.cn/inc/attach.php?AID=4692&MODULE=portal&YM=1707&ATTACHMENT\\_ID=-1026164823&ATTACHMENT\\_NAME=2014%C4%EA%B5%DA%CB%C4%C6%DA.PDF](https://web.archive.org/web/20200410184943/www.bjyx.org.cn/inc/attach.php?AID=4692&MODULE=portal&YM=1707&ATTACHMENT_ID=-1026164823&ATTACHMENT_NAME=2014%C4%EA%B5%DA%CB%C4%C6%DA.PDF).

163 “市友协接待捷中友好合作协会主席 [Beijing People’s Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries Receives Chairman of the Czech-China Chamber of Collaboration],” 北京市人民对外友好协会 [Beijing People’s Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries], September 30, 2014, available at [https://web.archive.org/web/20200408023645/http://www.bjyx.org.cn/portal/yxportal/articl.php?portal\\_id=12&column\\_id=67&content\\_id=654](https://web.archive.org/web/20200408023645/http://www.bjyx.org.cn/portal/yxportal/articl.php?portal_id=12&column_id=67&content_id=654).

164 Ibid.

Central and Eastern European cities.”<sup>165</sup> Executive Vice President of the BPAFFC, Tian Yan, responded by noting that “in recent years, Chairman Tvrđík had organically fused together every level of exchange, [and] formed a joint force for promoting the healthy development of bilateral relations.”<sup>166</sup>

**FIGURE 7: TVRĐÍK MEETS WITH BEIJING PEOPLE’S ASSOCIATION FOR FRIENDSHIP WITH FOREIGN COUNTRIES EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT TIAN YAN IN 2014 IN BEIJING<sup>167</sup>**



In 2015, Tvrđík further expanded his role in Czech-China economic relations by becoming deputy chairman of CEFC Group (Europe) Company (hereafter, CEFC Europe),<sup>168</sup> a subsidiary of CEFC China Energy, a now defunct PRC-based private company that advanced Chinese influence in the Czech Republic in the mid-2010s through a series of major investments.<sup>169</sup> Tvrđík used his positions to publicize and fawn over the supposed material benefits of Czech-China cooperation. In the run-up to Xi Jinping’s 2016 visit to the Czech Republic,

165 Ibid. Indeed, this meeting suggests Tvrđík’s support for, if not role in, Prague and Beijing establishing a sister city relationship in 2016.

166 Ibid.

167 Ibid.

168 “Relations Between Political Elites and Pro-China Business,” *Chinfluence*.

169 CEFC rapidly invested over US \$1 billion in the Czech Republic in the mid-2010s through prominent transactions across several industries, including real estate, aviation, hospitality, and sports, among other sectors. Astonishingly, in 2015, President Zeman even appointed Ye Jianming, CEFC’s founder and chairman, and a PRC citizen, as a special economic advisor. In 2018, Ye Jianming was arrested by Chinese authorities and CEFC became overburdened by debt. CEFC’s Czech assets were then taken over by a Chinese state-owned investment company, CITIC Group. For more on the role of CEFC China Energy in the Czech Republic, see Martin Hála and Jichang Lulu, “Lost in translation”; Barboza et al., “China Seeks Influence in Europe”; and Ji Tianqin and Han Wei, “Citic Advances Deal to Buy Czech Assets of CEFC,” *Caixin*, April 9, 2019, available at <https://www.caixinglobal.com/2019-04-09/citic-advances-deal-to-buy-czech-assets-of-cefc-101401817.html>.

Tvrđík said in a media interview that “President Xi’s visit is a dream moment for me” and that cooperation with China will benefit the Czech economy, especially in the financial and transportation sectors.<sup>170</sup> In a separate interview before Xi’s visit, Tvrđík noted that he has traveled to China over 100 times, adding “you could say, my heart is now half in the Czech Republic and half in China.”<sup>171</sup>

The Czech Republic’s relations with China may become less transparent and accountable due to the Czech government’s official reliance on the Chamber for managing BRI issues. In one particular case, the China-Czech Center for Cooperation, established in 2017 by the Czech Republic and China, was created to support the implementation of: 1) specific Belt and Road Initiative projects in the Czech Republic; and 2) the Memorandum of Understanding on Jointly Coordinating and Monitoring the Implementation of Bilateral Cooperation Plan and Projects under the Framework of the Belt and Road Initiative, which was signed by both governments in 2017.<sup>172</sup> Instead of designating a Czech government entity to work with this new center, the Czech government authorized the Chamber to work directly with China’s National Development and Reform Commission, the officially-designated PRC government partner entity. The Chamber now had official approval to work directly with the Chinese government, bypassing the Czech government itself.<sup>173</sup> This dynamic raises potential concerns for BRI projects involving the Czech Republic because the Chamber, as a private entity, is not subject to the same transparency laws and oversight procedures as a government office. This arrangement also raises questions about whether Tvrđík could potentially encounter competing interests given his multiple roles. He acts on behalf of the Czech national interest as an advisor to President Zeman and he concurrently serves as chairman of the Chamber and as a board member of CITIC Europe Holdings, a subsidiary of Chinese state-owned investment company CITIC Group, which took over CEFC Europe’s assets in 2019.<sup>174</sup> More broadly, the memorandum of understanding states that “China-Czech cooperation is ahead of China’s cooperation with other Central and Eastern European Countries (CEE)” and that this relationship is “a good example for CEE and other European countries

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170 Fu Jing, “Czech Republic prepares for ‘dream visit’ by Xi.”

171 管克江 [Guan Kejiang], “捷中友好合作有牢固基础——访捷中友协主席雅罗斯拉夫·德沃吉克 [Czech-China Friendly Cooperation Has a Secure Foundation—Interview with Czech-China Chamber of Collaboration President Jaroslav Tvrđík],” 环球网 [Global Times Online], 人民日报 [People’s Daily], available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20200210163451/https://world.huanqiu.com/article/9CaKrnJUP7F>.

172 “The First Meeting for the China-Czech Cooperation Center under the ‘Belt and Road’ Initiative Meeting Minutes,” Czech Republic Ministry of Industry and Trade, July 18, 2017, available at <https://www.mpo.cz/assets/cz/rozcestnik/ministerstvo/aplikace-zakona-c-106-1999-sb/informace-zverejnovane-podle-paragrafu-5-odstavec-3-zakona/2017/8/Zapis-z-jednani.pdf>.

173 Lomová et al., “Bilateral dialogue with the PRC at both ends.”

174 “Do Číny tentokrát bez Tvrđíka [To China This Time Without Tvrđík],” *Sinopsis*, June 9, 2018, available at <https://sinopsis.cz/do-ciny-tentokrat-bez-tvrdika/>. For information on the board of CITIC Europe Holdings, see “CITIC Europe Holdings a.s.,” Kurzy, <https://web.archive.org/web/20200528022138/https://rejstrik-firem.kurzy.cz/04170792/citic-europe-holdings-as/>.

with regard to the implementation of the ‘Belt and Road’ initiative.”<sup>175</sup> This memorandum may therefore indicate that the CCP views this center as a potential model to implement in other European countries.<sup>176</sup>

The Chamber and Tvrdík have criticized those who seek to rein in the Czech Republic’s China policy, citing negative economic repercussions. For example, they criticized the decision of the Prague city council to cancel its sister city relationship with Beijing over the inclusion of the PRC’s “One China” policy<sup>177</sup> in a clause of the official sister city agreement. During negotiations over the agreement, originally signed in 2016, Prague negotiators acquiesced to the clause’s inclusion in return for potential benefits in terms of trade, tourism, and cultural exchanges, and the promise of a panda for the Prague zoo.<sup>178</sup> In January 2019, Prague’s new mayor, Zdenek Hrib, asked Chinese officials to remove the One China policy language from the agreement, stating that it was inappropriate to include a national-level political issue in a municipal-level agreement.<sup>179</sup> The Prague government officially canceled its sister city agreement in October due to the reticence of Chinese officials to remove the clause.<sup>180</sup> In response, the Chamber argued that the Prague city council’s actions threatened both lucrative Chinese tourism in the city and the operations of Czech companies in China. Tvrdík emphasized the latter point, warning: “When his [Zeman’s] protective umbrella disappears from the Czech-Chinese relationship, there is a real risk that there will be no Czech-Chinese relations for many years. And that is a huge problem for Czech companies in China.”<sup>181</sup>

In contrast to the Italian case, the Czech case represents a limited CCP success. The Chamber, through the support of PPF and Home Credit, sustained pro-China voices within the Czech political system until election results enabled these individuals to assume

175 “The First Meeting for the China-Czech Cooperation Center under the ‘Belt and Road’ Initiative Meeting Minutes,” Czech Republic Ministry of Industry and Trade.

176 As Martin Hála notes, this model may already be spreading elsewhere in Europe, with Serbia as one example. Martin Hála, “Česko-čínská družba jako tichá pošta [Czech-Chinese Friendship as Silent Mail],” *Sinopsis*, July 17, 2017, available at <https://sinopsis.cz/cesko-cinska-druzba-jako-ticha-posta/> and Martin Hála, “Centrum pro integraci do Číny [Center for Integration into China],” *Sinopsis*, July 21, 2017, available at <https://sinopsis.cz/centrum-pro-integraci-do-cinevropy/>.

177 China’s “One China” policy stands in contrast to the United States’ “One China” policy, which simply states that there is “One China” but leaves ambiguous whether Taiwan is actually a part of China. This nuanced and intentionally ambiguous U.S. policy is sometimes misunderstood by those unfamiliar with the history of US-PRC-Taiwan relations.

178 “Respekt: Prague supports One-China policy to get panda,” *Prague Daily Monitor*, March 1, 2016, available at <http://praguemonitor.com/2016/03/01/respekt-prague-supports-one-china-policy-get-panda>. See also “Prague officially drops sister-agreement with Beijing amid deepening rift,” *Kafkadesk*, October 8, 2019, available at <https://kafkadesk.org/2019/10/08/prague-officially-drops-sister-agreement-with-beijing-amid-deepening-rift/>.

179 Milan Kajinec, “Prague Proposes to Amend Partnership Agreement with Beijing; Rejects ‘One China’ Policy,” *The Epoch Times*, January 17, 2019, available at [https://www.theepochtimes.com/prague-proposes-to-amend-partnership-agreement-with-beijing-rejects-one-china-policy\\_2769963.html](https://www.theepochtimes.com/prague-proposes-to-amend-partnership-agreement-with-beijing-rejects-one-china-policy_2769963.html).

180 “Prague officially drops sister-agreement with Beijing amid deepening rift,” *Kafkadesk*.

181 “Šanghaj pozastavila styky s Prahou, jejimu vedení to nevádí [Shanghai Has Suspended Relations with Prague, Its Leadership Does Not Mind],” *CTK*, January 14, 2020, available at <https://www.ceskenoviny.cz/zpravy/sanghaj-pozastavila-styky-s-prahou-jejimu-vedeni-to-nevadi/1842035>.

influential positions in or alongside government. The group was not particularly successful prior to the election of Zeman, but it certainly was able to seize on the advantage of a new president receptive to Chinese influence. The group has therefore functioned as a platform through which pro-China figures could expand their influence efforts over time, including through the establishment of new partner organizations. Yet, while Czech foreign policy shifted dramatically toward China over the last decade, the shift is primarily explained by President Zeman's election, CEFC's investments, and the overall lobbying of PPF and Home Credit, rather than the sole efforts of the Chamber.

Moreover, there is an ongoing backlash at lower levels of Czech government and society, as indicated by the Prague city council's actions above.<sup>182</sup> Many Czech citizens are concerned that their government adopted pro-China policies without adequately considering Czech national interests and public opinion. The Czech government's China-related policies are now subjected to greater scrutiny by the media and civil society groups, especially by the Sinopsis project.<sup>183</sup> Even President Zeman himself has begun to vent frustration over the failure of Chinese investment to materialize. Despite pledges dating back to Zeman's inaugural year in 2013, Chinese investment in the Czech Republic has increased only steadily and remains at relatively low levels.<sup>184</sup> This repeats the pattern of failed promises in the Italian case. As developments continue to unfold, the Czech case may even represent a case of overreach, in which China's policies became too reliant on the attitudes of a select group of foreign elites and China's resources were too few to develop and sustain a robust economic relationship.

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182 Martin Hála, "Making Foreign Companies Serve China." and Marc Santora, "The Broken Promise of a Panda."

183 "Bridging the Gap Between China & Central Europe," Sinopsis, December 29, 2017, available at <https://sinopsis.cz/en/bridging-the-gap-between-china-central-europe/>.

184 Keegan Elmer, "Why the 'honeymoon is over' between the Czech Republic and China," *South China Morning Post*, January 18, 2020, available at <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3046608/why-honeymoon-over-between-czech-republic-and-china>.





## CHAPTER 6

# Toward an Effective Response

### A Preliminary Assessment

The CCP has been quite successful at cultivating the key ingredients to its influence campaign by forging ties with friendship groups. The Party has been able to exploit the openness of Europe's civil society to leverage local front organizations to advance its interests. The groups have remained viable and active for years. The CCP has likely been able to sustain these front organizations at relatively low costs. Until recently, these fronts have avoided attracting unwanted attention while conducting united front work.

The three case studies show that there has been no shortage of willing partners to lead and join the friendship groups. Deva, Pivetti, and Tvrdík have all clearly spoken and acted in ways that serve the Party's designs and that are at odds with European values and interests. They have supported Europe's deeper engagement with China in areas that could pose security risks and have promoted the BRI. Indeed, all three individuals have helped to establish new centers that push Xi's agenda on the Belt and Road Initiative. In short, the friendship associations and their leaders have been uniformly aligned with core tenets of the CCP's international united front work summarized above.

Yet, these advances should be balanced against the limits of PRC united front work. In the Czech Republic, there is evidence of growing dissatisfaction with and backlash against Chinese influence. At the European Parliament, Deva was unable to sway his colleagues about China's potential security risk to Europe's telecommunications infrastructure. Deva's ethically problematic behavior has also drawn the glare of media attention. It is also noteworthy that some of the coopted foreigners featured in this report are obscure and somewhat marginal political figures. Pivetti has failed at the ballot box to reenter government service while Deva, who is viewed by many as unserious, was tossed out of office. It is unclear whether the Party's investment in relatively low-level, easy targets reflects the CCP's limited reach. In other words, it is possible that the PRC's influence machine still struggles to acquire top tier political figures and must settle more often for second rate politicians.

Although not a direct concern to Western governments, there remains uncertainty over the impact of the propaganda surrounding the friendship associations on China's public. It is difficult to measure the extent to which false narratives about Europe's acceptance of the Party's policies have convinced Chinese citizens. Even if it is possible to gauge public opinion in China about these matters, it is not clear how such sentiments concretely benefit the CCP.

Given the ambiguities about the friendship groups' relative importance and effectiveness, Western observers might be tempted to dismiss the associations as innocuous or, at worst, a nuisance. To Western eyes, distinctions between benign and malign influence and between influence and interference matter; such judgments help policymakers weigh the various dangers as well as prioritize and allocate scarce resources against more serious threats.<sup>185</sup> There is thus a predisposition to focus on the more obviously damaging and destructive elements of political operations and to discount seemingly harmless activities. Such a bias, however necessary and understandable, could potentially lead governments to misdiagnoses the problem.

As Jichang Lulu perceptively observes and as this study argues above, CCP influence operations must be recognized as the product of the party's Leninist outlook on politics.<sup>186</sup> Engagements (diplomatic or otherwise), alliances, and friendships, according to this worldview, are all expedients to be used ruthlessly on the road to power. A Leninist organization sees intrinsic value in influence in all its variations so long as it helps with the accrual of more power. Western observers should therefore not assume that the CCP evaluates the payoff of its united front work in the exact same way that they do. In other words, performance is in the eyes of the beholder. As long as the Party sees benefit in friendship groups as an element of its united front work, then it behooves European policymakers to pay adequate attention to them, even if these groups do not fit neatly the threat profile that Western analyst are normally accustomed to.

Moreover, the friendship groups' value to the CCP likely hinges on the influence campaign's place in the Party's larger regional and global strategy. The ubiquity of these associations across major powers and peripheral states alike suggests several possibilities. On the more maximal end of the spectrum, Beijing may be seeking to win over as many European governments as possible, drawing them closer to the CCP's orbit. The Party would have made major inroads in Europe if it were able to make common cause with heavyweights, like Germany, France, or the UK. Though unlikely, united front work keeps such an outcome in play.

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185 Former Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull, for example, identified three characteristics of foreign influence that should be considered harmful to the national interest. He declared that, "we will not tolerate foreign influence activities that are in any way covert, coercive or corrupt." Malcolm Turnbull, "Speech introducing the National Security Legislation Amendment (Espionage and Foreign Interference) Bill 2017," available at <https://www.malcolmturnbull.com.au/media/speech-introducing-the-national-security-legislation-amendment-espionage-an>. For an excellent study on distinguishing influence from interference, see Charles Parton, "China–UK Relations: Where to Draw the Border Between Influence and Interference?" Royal United Services Institute, February 2019, available at <https://rusi.org/publication/occasional-papers/china-uk-relations-where-draw-border-between-influence-and>.

186 Jichang Lulu, *Repurposing democracy*, p. 3.

It is also plausible that the CCP's aims are more disruptive in character. The Party may have adopted an indirect approach to erode Europe's collective will. By gradually peeling off weaker and smaller European states—many of which are more susceptible to influence operations and to the lure of Beijing's largesse—the Party could be seeking to fracture European consensus on China policy. By sowing divisions within Europe via the peripheral states, moreover, the CCP could undermine a more unified transatlantic approach to the PRC. At the same time, the Party values the smaller countries for their collective weight in multilateral forums, where their sympathies and votes could advance Beijing's ambitions to reshape global governance.<sup>187</sup> If the CCP is seeking to chip at away at the edifice of Western power, then the friendship groups' operations outside of Europe's power centers may be more significant than meets the eye. It should be noted that none of these aims are mutually exclusive, keeping an array of pathways open to the CCP.

Relatedly, united front work is not meant to win big, decisively, or quickly. The CCP recognizes that the dividends of influence operations accrue over time. As one united front source notes, "United front work is akin to simmering food over a low flame, an effort that takes a long time to succeed. Much of the labor occurs across ordinary times and only yields results over the long term."<sup>188</sup> The three case studies above suggest that the CCP places bets across European countries and accepts that the returns on those bets will be uneven and will bear fruit unpredictably over time. And, it appears that the Party's agents of influence achieve their aims through incremental gains, acquiring lower value targets that could, in time, pave the way to higher value proxies. Deva's successor, Zahradil, is a good example of how the CCP can eventually entice higher quality candidates to its side. The Party's sense of timing, then, is another differentiating factor in understanding how the CCP evaluates effectiveness.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge that the inferences drawn from this research are preliminary in character. This report offers a small sampling of a much larger network of friendship associations in Europe. A study of most, if not all, relevant groups would be necessary to draw more definitive conclusions and generalizations about this political phenomenon. As noted above, the friendship groups represent only one facet of a multi-pronged influence campaign that involves a panoply of other agents, such as local chapters that claim to represent the Chinese diaspora in Europe, chambers of commerce, joint ventures on technology development, and professional associations to name just a few. Because this is likely a collective CCP effort, involving as it does an overlapping network of actors, a meaningful measure of effectiveness would likely require a far more comprehensive assessment that includes Europe's heavyweights, such as Germany, France, and the UK. As such, a better measure of the friendship groups' effectiveness will require further

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187 We thank Dan Tobin for this insight.

188 中共中央统战部 编著 [United Front Work Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, ed.], 巩固发展最广泛的爱国统一战线 [Consolidate and Develop the Most Extensive Patriotic United Front] (Beijing: Huawen Press, 2016), p. 71.

study of their activities in Europe's powerhouses such as that of Didi Kirsten Tatlow's excellent research.<sup>189</sup>

In addition to wider regional coverage, more in-depth studies that rigorously measure effectiveness would enhance understanding of the friendship associations' impact. One possible method is to: 1) establish a baseline of incumbent government policies and prevailing attitudes among elites and the public alike within a European country; 2) identify those policies and attitudes that the CCP seeks to change in its favor; 3) track changes to those policies and attitudes; and 4) evaluate the extent to which changes to those policies and attitudes—in positive or negative directions in the eyes of the Party—over time can be attributed to united front work.<sup>190</sup> Demonstrating correlation, much less causation, between shifts in European policies and opinion and CCP influence is likely quite difficult. But those with deep knowledge of the local political landscape and policy process, access to relevant polling data, and a strong grasp of in-country united front operations could make substantial headway in evaluating the effectiveness of Chinese influence. Some of the initial propositions made above can then be tested against such future research.

## Responding to Friendship Groups in Europe

European authorities and civil society are in a good position to implement measured approaches and policies to better understand, monitor, and push back against friendship associations.<sup>191</sup> Europe's many topflight academic and research institutions should promote rigorous, deep studies on Chinese influence operations that draw on primary sources. For example, the *Sinopsis* project, a collaboration between the non-profit AcaMedia and Prague's Charles University, publishes cutting-edge scholarly works on PRC influence, representing a model for future research. As the case studies above illustrate, the Chinese-language literature offers a wealth of publicly available information, data, and insights that are not found in non-Chinese language sources. This study shows that all bureaucracies have an imperative to communicate their vision, mission, and day-to-day activities. Even secretive CCP organs must telegraph their reasons for being. These institutions, purposively and inadvertently, reveal surprising details about and insights into the CCP's influence campaign in their native tongue. Outside observers should access and exploit these empirically rich materials to evaluate the nature and character of the threat.<sup>192</sup>

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189 As noted above, Didi Kirsten Tatlow's *Sinopsis* article, "Mapping China-in-Germany," represents a model for in-depth studies of the CCP's overlapping and sprawling influence network within a European power.

190 We thank Dan Tobin for suggesting this analytic approach.

191 For broader recommendations on how the West can wage a counteroffensive in political warfare, see Hal Brands and Toshi Yoshihara, "Waging Political Warfare," *National Interest*, no. 159, January/February 2019, pp. 16-26.

192 Lars Peter Fredén, "The EU Badly Needs to Raise its Game on China," *China Observers in Central and Eastern Europe*, August 7, 2019, available at <https://chinaobservers.eu/the-eu-badly-needs-to-raise-its-game-on-china/>.

Relatedly, European politicians should establish bureaucratic reporting mechanisms and processes that serve as public government records of CCP influence efforts. European lawmakers could establish investigative commissions that publish annual reports on foreign influence, or pass laws requiring their national governments or EU institutions to publish annual reports on China's political influence activities. To make such reports politically acceptable in certain countries, lawmakers could structure the reporting requirements to include external political influence activities writ large, with CCP efforts being only a subset. Such reports could focus solely within a respective country's borders but, ideally, would include information on CCP activities across Europe as a whole. Such public reporting can raise European awareness of China's influence activities and hold accountable European politicians or administrations that either are being or have been coopted by the CCP.

Civil society groups and government institutions can subject CCP-promoted storylines to competition in the free marketplace of ideas. It is, of course, not possible to argue against every single Chinese point, given the sheer volume of information and disinformation the party-state apparatus pumps out every day and the resource constraints among Western governments and civil societies. It is also not necessary to do so. Some CCP narratives, including claims of enlightened rule in Xinjiang and Tibet, are clearly more harmful to Western interests than others. European experts and officials should prioritize their efforts, selectively debunking CCP-concocted myths and challenging the party's problematic propositions on issues of significance in public fora.

Beyond public reporting, European governments and EU institutions need to put in place, where necessary, rules and regulations to govern the political gray zones in which Chinese influence operations thrive. As the case studies show, the various friendship groups at the national and EU levels enjoy significant latitude in their dealings with CCP bodies while their nongovernmental statuses allow the groups to evade public scrutiny. As a result, the groups' members have engaged in ethically problematic activities that would normally constitute conflicts of interest. These groups and their activities thus need to be subjected to greater oversight.

National parliaments and the EU Parliament should develop regulatory mechanisms, where appropriate, that enhance accountability and transparency. For example, friendship associations should be required to provide a full list of their members while elected officials should formally declare their affiliations with those groups. Public disclosure of the groups' funding sources and about individuals who play an outsize organizational role in those groups should also be available for scrutiny. At the EU level, negotiators are continuing discussions about shifting the voluntary Transparency Register into a mandatory mechanism.<sup>193</sup> Similarly, analysts have called on some national governments to enact legislation akin to the U.S.

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193 European Parliament, "Third round of talks on the proposal for a mandatory Transparency Register," Press Release, February 14, 2019, available at <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20190213IPR26332/third-round-of-talks-on-the-proposal-for-a-mandatory-transparency-register>.

Foreign Agents Registration Act that obligates individuals or entities to disclose their work on behalf of foreign governments, political parties, associations, organizations, corporations, and individuals.<sup>194</sup> Where relevant, European countries could pass legislation that imposes a specified moratorium period on former officials, precluding them from post-government lobbying on behalf of foreign governments or foreign political parties.<sup>195</sup>

European responses to Chinese influence will be stronger through collective action. European civil society organizations and businesses should pool resources and share information by forming multi-national networks or working groups that support research and analysis in political, economic, and social areas within which China is attempting to exert influence. Civil society groups or businesses could form networks on issues related to their institutional focus, whether it be democratic governance, human rights, media independence, investment security, supply chain security, or transportation and communications infrastructure. Such groupings need not have a specific agenda other than to promote collaboration and research regarding China's activities.

European governments could enhance cooperation on this issue through inter-governmental exchanges among policymakers and analysts, as well as information sharing on Chinese activities. As the above cases illustrate, the degree of CCP effort varies across European countries. Lessons gleaned from countries that have been subjected to intense united front work may prove invaluable if shared with officials and publics in neighboring European states which have yet to experience the brunt of these activities.

Finally, Europe should draw strength from the formal and informal networks that it enjoys with many democratic governments that face similar challenges from the CCP. The Chinese Communist Party has conducted influence campaigns of various stripes across the Indo-Pacific and North America. Some of the most egregious examples of the party's interference operations were uncovered in Australia, New Zealand, and Taiwan.<sup>196</sup> The CCP has also left a trail of evidence in the United States, Canada, and Japan.<sup>197</sup> Beijing has clearly opened a global front against liberal democracies. There is thus a broad basis for cross-national and interregional collaboration among democracies, including information sharing on best practices in curbing CCP influence.

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194 Tatlow, "Mapping China-in-Germany."

195 The United States imposes a cooling-off period for government officials under the Ethics Reform Act of 1989. Revolving Door Working Group, *A Matter of Trust: How the Revolving Door Undermines Public Confidence in Government—And What To Do About It*, Project on Government Oversight, October 2005, pp. 38-40, available at <http://pogoarchives.org/m/gc/a-matter-of-trust-20051001.pdf>. We thank Joe O'Neill for this recommendation.

196 Paul Huang, "Chinese Cyber-Operatives Boosted Taiwan's Insurgent Candidate," *Foreign Policy*, June 26, 2019, available at <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/06/26/chinese-cyber-operatives-boosted-taiwans-insurgent-candidate/>.

197 Russell Hsiao, "A Preliminary Survey of CCP Influence Operations in Japan," *China Brief* 19, No. 12, June 26, 2019, available at <https://jamestown.org/program/a-preliminary-survey-of-cp-influence-operations-in-japan/>.

Europe benefits uniquely from a transatlantic partnership that could serve as a basis for collective action. Frontline states in Asia have much to teach their fellow democracies. Canberra's sweeping reforms of its security and foreign interference laws and its ongoing efforts to combat Chinese interference represent a model for others under assault. Taiwan's responses to decades of CCP political warfare, including the recent anti-infiltration legislation that seeks to preclude political interference by foreign hostile actors, could offer useful lessons to fellow democracies.





## CHAPTER 7

# Conclusion

Moving forward, there is still much work to be done to assess the phenomenon of China friendship groups and the larger influence network to which it belongs. It may be useful to calculate the “influence burden” for the CCP, akin to the defense burden, which can be measured as a percentage of an aggregate resource or budget.<sup>198</sup> Even a rough estimate of the influence campaign’s relative cost would provide indicators of the operations’ sustainability. Some sense of the burden would also hint at the Party’s expectations about the returns on its investment. If the burden is found to be negligible, then the CCP may be prepared to sustain its operations over the long haul, even if the results remain disappointing. It may benefit the field, furthermore, to study more closely the individuals who have assumed leadership positions within the various friendship groups and other front organizations. Some understanding of the motivations behind the personal decisions to serve as the Party’s proxies could help observers identify the kinds of inducements the CCP offers its targets to obtain their cooperation.<sup>199</sup> Such knowledge would help Western governments and civil societies develop targeted and actionable counters to the CCP’s enticements.

Cross-national comparisons within Europe and its subregions also hold analytical promise. Such cross-country comparisons should rigorously evaluate the relative effectiveness of the associations and track variations in the performance of these groups across Europe. This type of synthesis might yield important insights about the communist regime’s strategy, including common patterns of behavior and modes of operation. It might also shed light on Beijing’s relative weight of effort across Europe and on what the CCP perceives as its priority targets at the subnational, national, and supranational levels. Findings of this kind would help the policy community identify European countries that are under most stress or that are the most vulnerable, enabling decisionmakers to allocate attention and resources to them accordingly.

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198 We thank Max Ernst for raising the issue of costs to the CCP.

199 We thank Max Ernst for his suggestion concerning the need to understand personal motivations to serve as CCP proxies.

Based on such an integrated threat assessment, future studies should offer concrete recommendations on how policymakers at the local, national, and Europe-wide levels can plan for and conduct effective counter-influence operations.<sup>200</sup> Future works should consider the division of labor, information-sharing arrangements, and active collaboration that would be necessary between actors at all these levels for such operations to take place. If this study's proposition that CCP influence will likely maintain a long-lasting presence in Europe is correct, then European governments and civil society must act now to fend off and roll back the Party's political offensive.

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<sup>200</sup> We thank Max Ernst for his observation about cooperation at the local, national, and Europe-wide levels.

## LIST OF ACRONYMS

<b>AFROC</b>	All-China Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese
<b>AIB</b>	Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank
<b>BPAFFC</b>	Beijing People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries
<b>BRI</b>	Belt and Road Initiative
<b>CCP</b>	Chinese Communist Party
<b>CCTV</b>	China Central Television
<b>CEE</b>	Central and Eastern Europe
<b>CPAFFC</b>	Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries
<b>CPPCC</b>	Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference
<b>ČSSD</b>	Czech Social Democratic Party
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>ICFA</b>	Italy-China Friendship Association
<b>MEP</b>	Member of the European Parliament
<b>MOU</b>	Memorandum of Understanding
<b>PLA</b>	People's Liberation Army
<b>PRC</b>	People's Republic of China
<b>UK</b>	United Kingdom
<b>ZFROC</b>	Zhejiang Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese



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