



China's inroads into Slovak universities

Protecting academic freedoms
from authoritarian malign interference

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CEIAS
Central European Institute
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Summary

- Interest in Sino-Slovak cooperation in the academic sector has been growing since the inception of the 17+1 platform and Belt and Road Initiative in 2012 and 2013 respectively. Over the years, Slovak academic institutions – public universities and institutes of the Slovak Academy of Science – have established 113 different ties and interactions with Chinese partners.
- The goal of this publication is not to discourage from engaging with China, as cooperation with Chinese entities can be beneficial for the Slovak academic sector to some extent. However, due to the nature of the Chinese regime, specific risks exist in the cooperation with Chinese entities, which the Slovak academic institutions need to be wary of and reflect on them in their dealings with China.
- Interactions with Chinese partners take on various forms, ranging from formalized cooperation agreements, informal ties, joint research projects, as well as student and faculty exchanges.
- On the Chinese side, universities, non-university research institutions, corporations, as well as state institutions engage in cooperation with Slovak academia.
- Cooperation with Chinese entities suffers from a low level of transparency. Less than half of concluded cooperation agreements are published in the Central Registry of Contracts. Despite potential technology transfers from publicly funded institutions, current laws do not require Chinese entities (especially corporations) to disclose their beneficial owners, as is the case with other types of relations where publicly funded entities provide valuable consideration to private parties.
- Generally, universities and the Slovak Academy of Science do not engage in a systemic risk assessment before and during cooperation with China. This is largely due to low sensitivity towards risks posed by China as well



as a perceived high standard of research and education at Chinese universities compared to Slovakia.

- Cooperation is focused mostly on hard sciences. Around three-quarters of mutual interactions happen with Slovak academic institutions focusing on natural sciences and technology.
- Currently, three Confucius Institutes operated at Slovak universities: Comenius University, Slovak University of Technology, and Matej Bel University. They are active mostly in language education and cultural promotion, but also in Chinese traditional medicine, and education in Chinese politics and economy. Confucius Institutes at Comenius University and the Slovak University of Technology engage in activities at several other universities and high schools around Slovakia. Considerable financial flows between the Confucius Institutes and Slovak entities exist, yet they are marred with low transparency.
- From the 113 academic interactions between Slovakia and China, 25 happen with Chinese academic institutions in various ways linked to the People's Liberation Army. According to a database by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, over 60% of these relations are with universities categorized 'high risk' or 'very high risk'.
- The 'Seven Sons of National Defense', a group of premier military-linked research universities, feature prominently among the 'very high risk' ties. Slovak Academy of Science established a joint research center with the Northwestern Polytechnical University. Technical University in Zvolen cooperates with the Nanjing University of Science and Technology. Both the University of Žilina and the Technical University in Košice maintain relations with the Beijing Institute of Technology.
- Besides universities and research institutes, Slovak academic institutions cooperate with several Chinese corporations. Three Chinese tech firms stand out here: Huawei, ZTE, and Dahua.



Recommendations

- Publicly financed academic institutions need to improve their transparency when it comes to cooperating with Chinese institutions. Improved transparency will allow for public oversight of Chinese activities in the academic sector.
- Despite a clear and sanctioned legal obligation, numerous agreements with Chinese entities were not published in the Central Registry of Contracts. Academic institutions need to improve their track record on publishing their agreements and memoranda with Chinese entities in the Registry.
- The government should revisit the obligation to publish the ultimate beneficial owners in a public registry. Academic institutions should mandate that foreign entities declare their beneficial owners in the Registry of Public Sector Partners before concluding a partnership with Slovak academic institutions. This obligation should exist regardless of the current transactional value census, as the nature of these partnerships makes it virtually impossible to estimate the value of the partnership.
- Before establishing new cooperation or partnership with a Chinese entity, academic institutions should conduct a rigorous risk assessment and implement risk-mitigating measures to prevent abuse of the partnership.
- To aid the risk assessment process, the Ministry of Education in cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and security apparatus should issue clear guidelines on how to safely cooperate with entities based in authoritarian countries (China, but also Russia, Turkey, various Arab states, etc). The guidelines should include also an illustrative list of best and worst practices.
- Connections to the Chinese military and complicity in human rights abuses should be among the key criteria of risk assessment. Connection to the Chinese military should be grounds for deploying enhanced risk



mitigation measures (e. g. limiting the cooperation to areas that do not result in the development of dual-use technology). Complicity in human rights abuses should always result in termination of the cooperation as committing or enabling mass atrocity crimes is in absolute contradiction to the basic values enshrined in the Constitution of the Slovak Republic and its international legal obligations.

- The results of the risk assessment should be taken into account also when making decisions about awarding research funding from Slovak resources for joint research with Chinese academic institutions. In case of evaluation resulting in a higher risk assessment, funding should always be conditional on the adoption of specific, pre-approved risk countermeasures.
- A specific issue to consider is the financing of China-focused education and research. Slovak academic institutions should not rely on China-provided funding and expertise to educate future generations of China experts (not only sinologists, but also China-focused economy, international relations, and other experts).
- Building upon the previous point, academic institutions should reconsider future cooperation with the Confucius Institutes. As a bare minimum, they should take steps to limit the Confucius Institutes' activities to language education and cultural promotion only, and not engage in policy and politics related activities (including research, education, and advocacy).
- As China is becoming an increasingly important actor in global affairs, affecting Slovakia as well, the government should allocate resources (including EU funding) to build up a domestic China expertise and education programs.
- A center of excellence in modern China should be established. The center should focus on applied policy-focused research and provide expertise to policymakers from various levels of government.



1 Introduction

In the 2018 Annual Report, Slovak Intelligence Service, Slovakia's civilian (counter)intelligence, warned against China's increasingly prominent attempt to influence both public and expert discourse within the European Union (EU) to its benefit.¹ Nevertheless, when in 2019 a Confucius Institute opened at the Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica, the event went largely unnoticed in Slovakia, including its media and expert communities. Scarce media coverage of the occasion was limited to exalting the institute's founding by Lin Lin, then Chinese ambassador in Slovakia.²

This episode serves to show that Slovak universities are not yet ready to academically engage with Chinese entities in a way, which would not expose them to the more corrosive aspects of dealing with the Chinese party-state-military-academia-society nexus where "the Party leads on everything".³

The lack of recognition of potential risks in cooperating with Chinese academic institutions and other entities in the sphere of academic cooperation stems from the general perception that China is not yet an overly active actor in Slovakia. However, already a cursory investigation of academic ties between Slovak universities and Chinese research institutions conducted within the framework of the MapInfluenCE project⁴ has shown that academic exchange with China is alive and thriving in numerous areas (Confucius Institute, research cooperation, student and academic exchanges, etc.) without engaging in any sort of risk assessment, not to speak of risk mitigation.⁵ This report builds upon those findings in an attempt to provide the most comprehensive record of how Slovak academic institutions engage with their Chinese counterparts to date.

To map the interaction of Slovak and Chinese academic institutions, we have relied on data collected from various open sources.

First, we have gathered data by filing Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests to the public universities and institutes of the Slovak Academy of



Science (SAV). We have used this method to gather data on the scope and outcomes of cooperation with Chinese entities, as well as evaluate the financial flows between them. Filing the FOIA requests has also helped us to evaluate the overall openness of public academic institutions when it comes to their dealings with China.

Second, we used various public registries operated by the Government of Slovakia, chief among them the Central Registry of Contracts.⁶ In this registry, since 2011, public entities in Slovakia are obliged to record virtually all their contracts else they become void.

Third, we juxtaposed the collected data with media coverage of various academic interactions.

As for the scope of this paper, our research targeted 23 public universities, 2 state universities, the Slovak Academy of Science (SAS), and its 26 research institutes (which are independent legal entities).

Before offering an overview of our findings in the following chapters, we wish to stress that it is not our aim to discourage Slovak academic institutions from engaging with Chinese counterparts. Mutual exchange, provided that it is done sustainably and equitably, can be beneficial to the development of academia in Slovakia. However, due to the authoritarian nature of the Chinese regime, which relies on a whole-of-society approach to achieving its interests (including academic institutions, civil society, and corporations), engaging with Chinese entities carries specific risks. Thus, we aim to draw attention to these risks and offer measures on how to mitigate them in order to achieve a truly mutually beneficial interaction safe from abuse.

In the following chapters, we provide a general overview of the interactions, focusing on their nature and volume, as well as problems related to their low transparency. This is followed by a discussion on aspects that we find the most problematic: the operation of Confucius Institutes in Slovakia, ties with institutions linked to the Chinese military, and ties with certain Chinese tech firms.

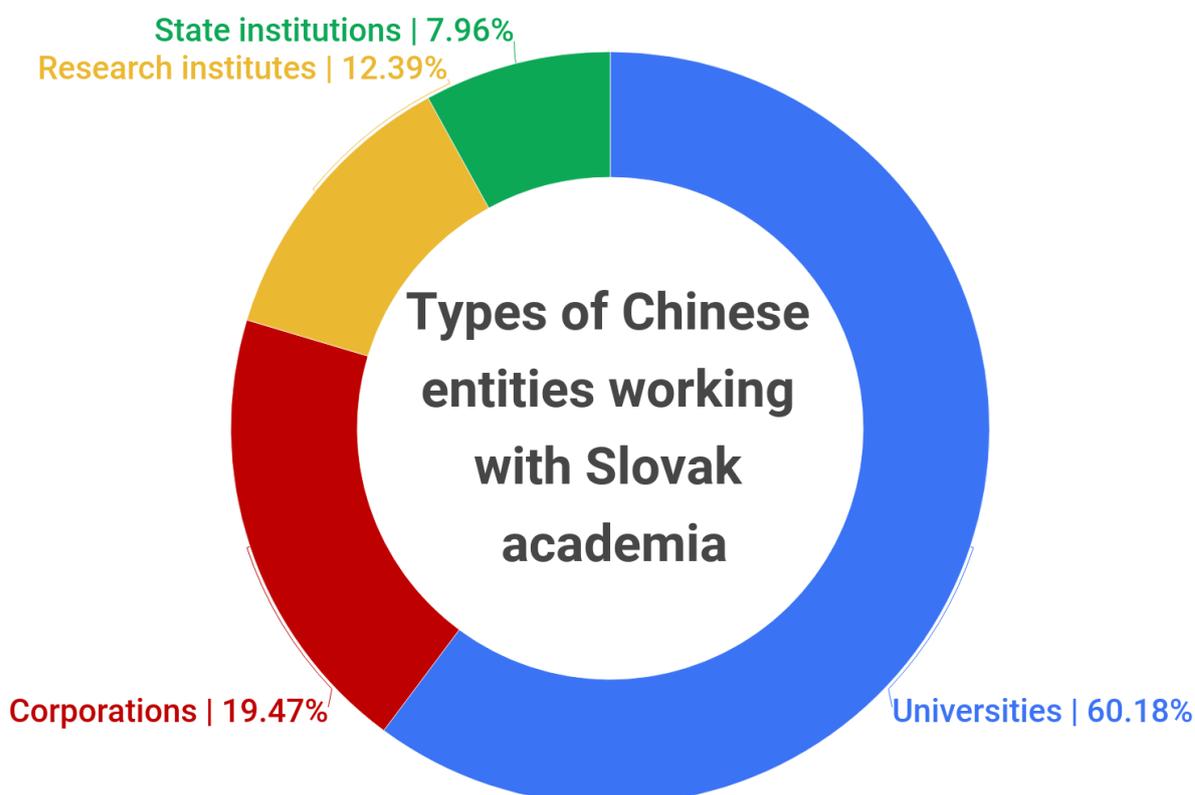


2 General observations

Our investigation has found that altogether 113 ties between Chinese entities and Slovak academic institutions exist. Of these, 81 were entered into by Slovak public universities, while the remaining 32 are tied to the Slovak Academy of Science and its various research institutes.

Most of these ties were made with Chinese universities as counterparts – approximately 60%. Around one-fifth of interactions relate to Chinese corporations, including Huawei and ZTE. Next, non-university research institutes (e.g. the Chinese Academy of Science or the Chinese Academy of Social Science) are represented in approximately 12% of all ties. Little less than 8% relate to public institutions, namely the Confucius Institutes Headquarters (Hanban) and the three Confucius Institutes which operate in Slovakia.

Figure 1: *Types of Chinese entities working with Slovak academic institutions*
(source: CEIAS)

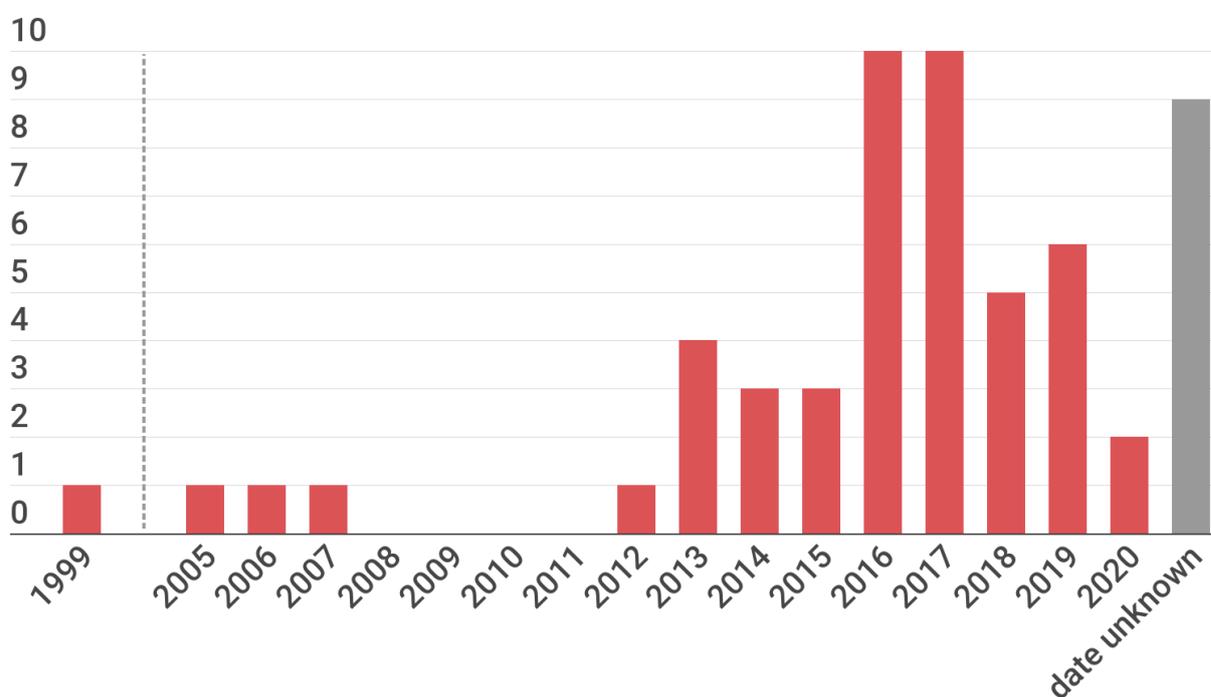




These ties tend to take a variety of forms, ranging from binding agreements, non-binding memoranda, joint-cooperation on grant programs, to various informal ties. Of the 113 ties, only 57 interactions were formalized by signing a contract or a memorandum of cooperation (for the sake of legibility both will be hereinafter referred to as “agreements”).

While a few agreements were established as early as 1999 and 2000s, the true onset of mutual interest did not start until 2013, coinciding with the announcement of China’s flagship Belt and Road Initiative and CEE-specific 17+1 platform a year earlier. Since then, there has been a growing trend of establishing new forms of cooperation, reaching a peak in 2016-2017, when as many as 10 new ties were established each of the two years. Since then, it seems that the interest in cooperation has been plummeting, with only 5 new ties established in 2018 and 6 new ties in 2019.

Figure 2: Number of newly concluded agreements between Slovak academic institutions and Chinese entities (source: CEIAS)





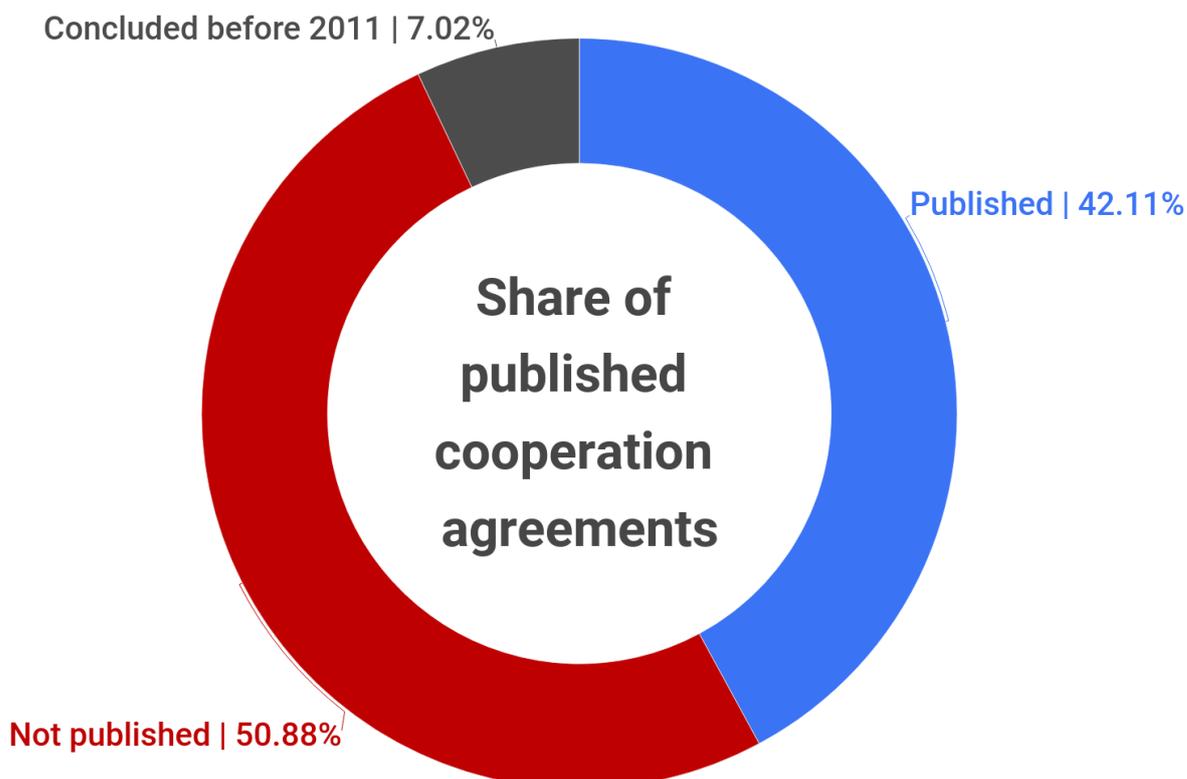
2.1 Transparency takes a hit

Transparency of the linkages with Chinese entities came out to be one of the major issues we have uncovered as part of this study.

Since 2011, under the Slovak Freedom of Information Act, public institutions (including public universities and Slovak Academy of Science) are obliged to publish all the contracts they enter into, regardless of the values of the contractual consideration. Any public contract concluded after 2011, which is not published in the Central Registry of Contracts cannot take effect and if they are not published within three months of conclusion they become void.

During our investigation, we have identified 57 interactions between Slovak academic institutions and Chinese entities, which can be labeled as contractual (i.e. a contract, agreement, or a memorandum of some sort was signed by the cooperating parties). However, of these agreements, only less than half were made available to the public in the registry.

Figure 3: Share of cooperation agreements published in the Central Registry of Contracts (source: Central Registry of Contracts)





As to the reason why these agreements were not published in the Central Registry of Contracts, we can only guess, whether it was intentional, due to negligence of the responsible personnel, or due to other reasons.

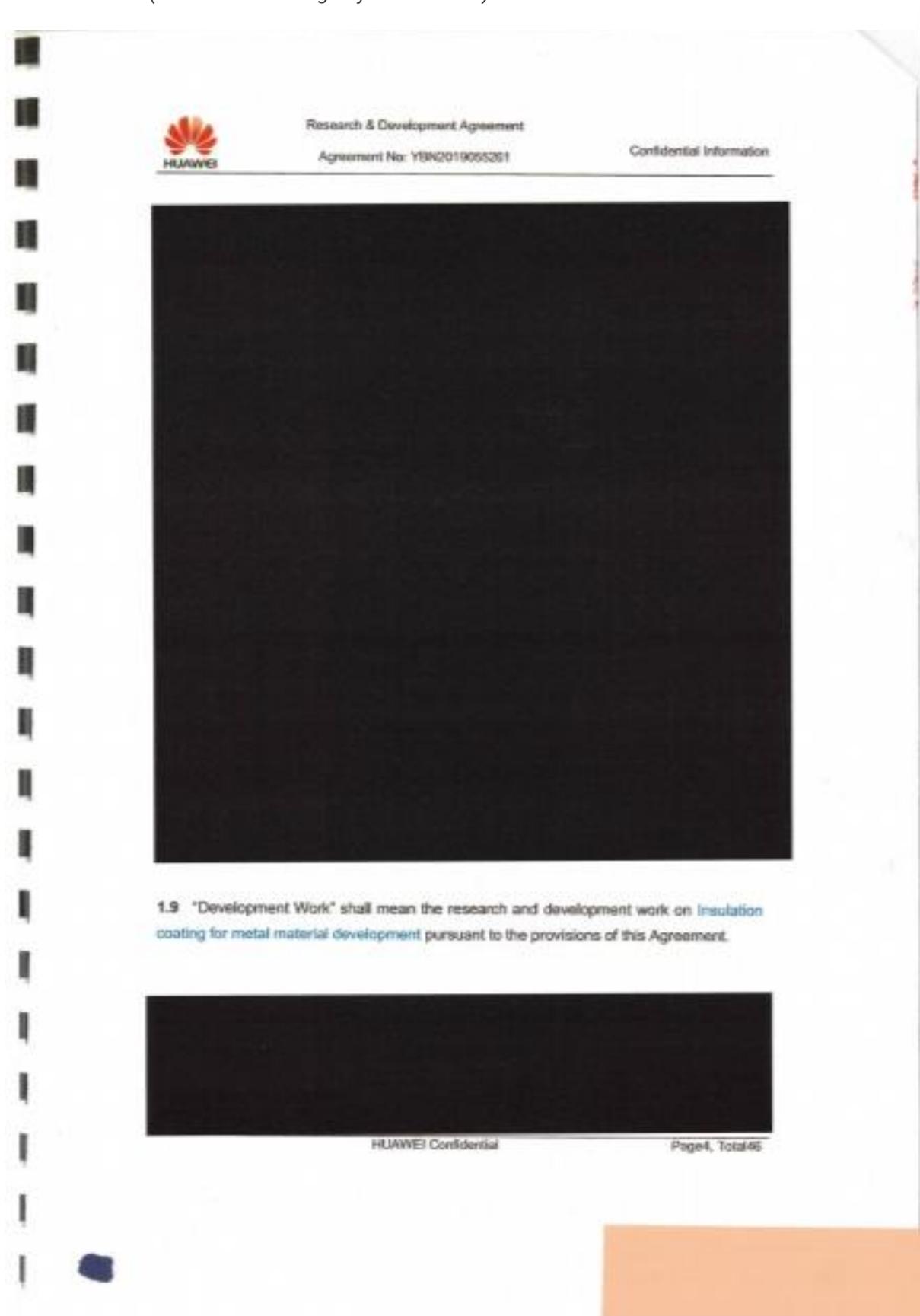
An important reason for the low share of published agreements may lie in the unclear scope of the Freedom of Information Act. Two possible interpretations of the law emerge. On one hand, in a purely positivist interpretation, only legally binding contracts from which rights and obligations arise must be published. On the other hand, a more extensive interpretation that would mandate also various memoranda of understanding and letters of intent to be published is also possible.

Indeed, various academic institutions have different practices when it comes to contract publication. Some have published both legally binding contracts as well as non-binding memoranda, while others did not publish the non-binding memoranda. Still, plenty of academic institutions did not publish either type of documents.

Even when the agreements are published, the quality of the disclosure is often problematic. In the most extreme cases, we have encountered agreements redacted to such an extent, that they contained virtually no information on the relationship at all. The most striking example of this is the Research and Development Agreement concluded between Huawei Technologies and SAS Institute of Materials Research, which was concluded in October 2019.⁷ The published agreement has been redacted almost entirely (besides the identification of parties), supposedly due to the need to protect the parties' scientific research which would allow them to file for patent protection of the research outputs. Regardless of whether such extensive redaction or the reason for it is legal, the scope of the redacting is excessive, as certain business aspects of the relationship, such as clauses on the remuneration or intellectual property ownership have no relevance for future patent applications. As a result of the excessive redacting, the public has been rendered unable to learn more details about the SAS cooperation with Huawei (more on cooperation with Huawei in chapter 5).



Figure 4: A page from Huawei - SAS Institute of Materials Research agreement (source: Central Registry of Contracts)





On the other hand, the disclosures made in the Central Registry of Contracts helped us to identify several interactions which the academic institutions failed to disclose in response to our FOIA requests.

As one-fifth of interactions of Slovak academic institutions happen with Chinese corporations, the issue of corporate governance transparency arises. To fight local oligarchy, Slovakia enacted the Act on Registry of Public Sector Partners in 2017. The purpose of the law was to shine a light on the murky corporate governance of companies that local Slovak oligarchs used to do business with the government. This is done by disclosing the ownership structures, culminating with the natural persons who ultimately control or profit from the company.

The contractual relations with Chinese corporations showcase the limits of the Act on Registry of Public Sector Partners. The law does not cover the type of agreements that the academic institutions typically conclude with Chinese corporations. These types of contracts can serve not only as vehicles for fostering ties with malign effects on academic freedoms but more importantly also on national security, as they provide the Chinese corporations with access to intellectual property and potential technology transfers. Thus, it is advisable to consider amending the law to include the conclusion of cooperation agreements by universities as an additional situation when the partner entity would need to register in the registry, regardless of the value of the contract, which can be difficult to ascertain at the onset of the cooperation.

2.2 The illusion of risk assessment

While cooperation with Chinese academic institutions does not present a prima facie security risk, the specifics of the Chinese system of governance – including the local universities' ties with the party-state apparatus and Chinese military (see Chapter 4) warrants heightened scrutiny of Chinese partners and implementation of risk assessment and mitigation measures.

Due to this, as part of our investigation, we have assessed the processes that the Slovak academic institutions use to evaluate potential risks



stemming from cooperation with Chinese entities. To this end, we have asked the academic institutions as part of our FOIA requests to state whether they engage in any sort of risk assessment and if yes, then on what criteria.

Based on the provided responses, we have concluded that Slovak academic institutions do not engage in any sort of systemic risk. Of the 24 academic institutions which have some sort of interaction with China, a majority of them reported that no risk assessment is carried out. At best, risk assessment is an ad hoc event without following any pre-determined criteria.

This demonstrates the low risk sensitivity to Chinese activities among Slovak academic institutions, a trait not so uncommon in the Slovak public sphere. A response by the Faculty of Electrical Engineering and Informatics of the Technical University in Košice is rather illustrative of this outlook: “The most likely risk is that we do not reach the quality levels of education and research at Chinese universities, which can lead to them losing interest in support of and cooperation with us.”⁸

2.3 The question of a domestic agency

Even though most of the global discussions on China’s influence in academia focuses on financial flows from China to recipients abroad, cooperation is often driven by a domestic agency. Slovakia is no exception in this regard.

An example of the domestically driven engagement with Chinese entities can be seen in regular financial support provided by the Slovak Research and Development Agency to research projects implemented in partnership with Chinese entities.

Support for such projects has been given at least since 2007. Calls for proposals have been issued in 2007, 2009, 2012, 2015, and 2017. Under the grant scheme, on average, projects worth approximately 100 000 EUR was supported in each call for proposals. The supported projects focused on the fields of natural, technical, and agricultural sciences.⁹



In 2018, a special call for proposals was issued for projects focusing on material science, nanotechnology, laser technology, and ICT. Three projects aggregately valued at 566 410 EUR were supported under the scheme.

Even though the project proposal form requires Slovak institutions to list a Chinese partner with which they will be cooperating on the project, names of the partner institutions in China are not disclosed publicly in the registry of supported projects.¹⁰

2.4 STEMs driving the interaction

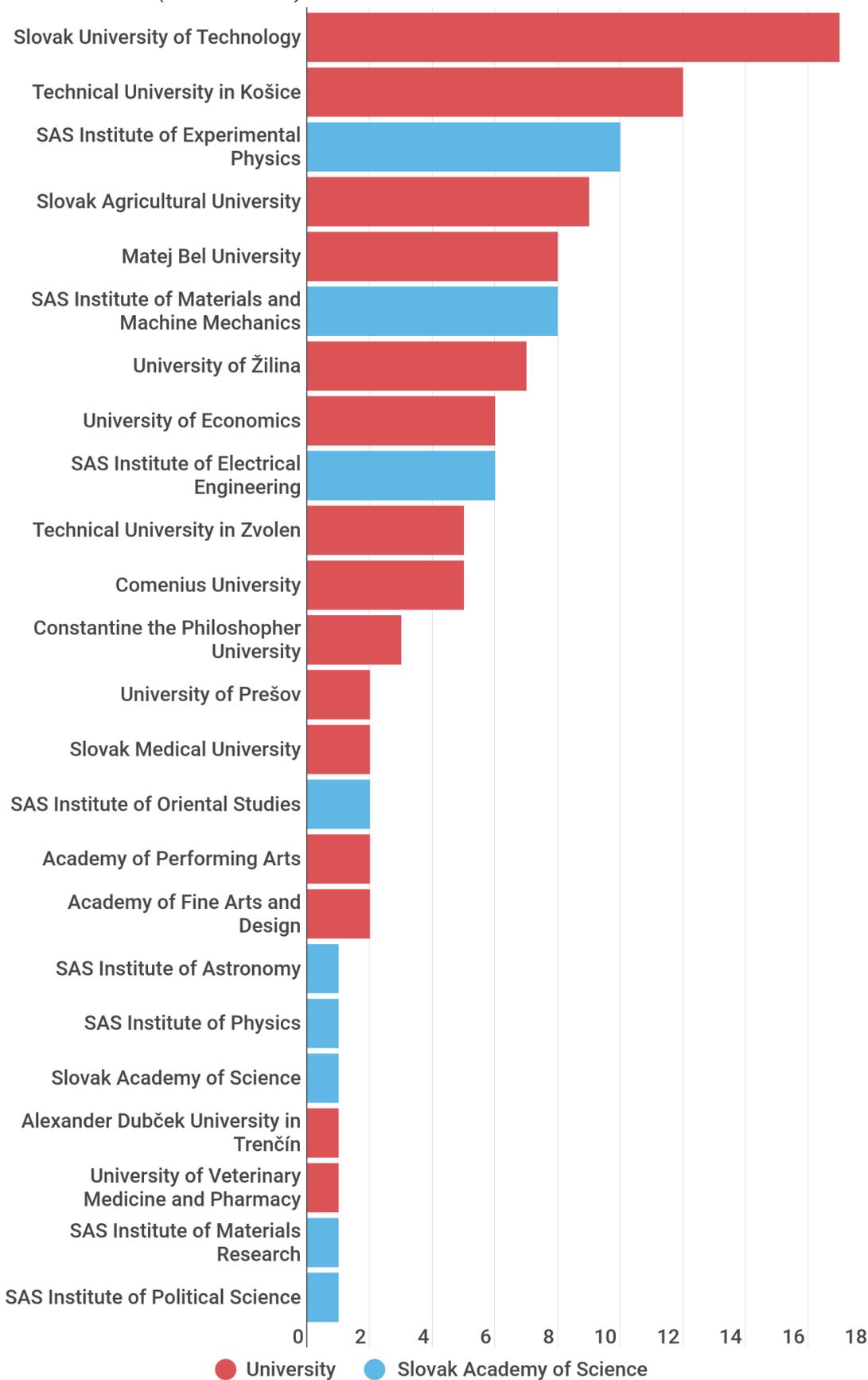
The number of interactions with Chinese entities varies quite a lot among Slovak academic institutions. Nevertheless, the most interest lies in cooperation in the natural sciences, engineering, and technology.

Relations with Chinese entities established by the Slovak University of Technology in Bratislava and Technical University in Košice, Slovakia's premier technical schools, represent as much as one-quarter of all interactions with China. Altogether universities and SAS research institutes active in hard sciences account for three-quarters of all interactions with China.

These statistics seem to confirm the recent evaluation by the Slovak security apparatus that Chinese entities attempt to gain access to sectors, which can be sources of information useable for the future economic development of China.¹¹ Nevertheless, an agency on part of Slovak academic institutions should not be discounted as we stressed previously.



Figure 5: Number of ties with Chinese entities among Slovak academic institutions (source: CEIAS)





3 Confucius Institutes

Confucius Institutes (CIs) serve as one of the ways in which the Chinese government promotes Chinese culture and language learning. While on the surface, they are often compared to the British Council or the Goethe Institutes, the role the Confucius plays in international relations may be quite different. This is mainly because they operate under the governance of Hanban, which in itself is linked to the Chinese Ministry of Education. CIs have attracted international criticism over the lack of transparency, and reports of self-censorship from both Chinese teachers and professors at the universities they are based at.¹² Currently, there are 541 CI's worldwide, with 187 in Europe.¹³ In theory, their role is to promote a positive image of China abroad by presenting Chinese culture and offering education in the Mandarin language.

Currently, 3 Confucius Institutes and 3 Confucius Classrooms operate in Slovakia (interestingly, Hanban currently lists only one Confucius Classroom operating in Slovakia).

The oldest CI was founded in 2007, and it was built on cooperation between the Slovak University of Technology and the University of Tianjin.¹⁴ Since 2017, Confucius Institute has provided language classes at another Slovak University, the Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra. Since the 2017/2018 academic year, this module can be taken by the students as a credited module at the universities' Faculty of Arts.¹⁵ The Confucius Institute at Slovak University of Technology also provides education in the Chinese language at 4 elementary and high schools in Bratislava.¹⁶ The CI at Slovak Technical University is currently planning on opening a Confucius classroom at the Mikuláš Kováč Grammar School in Banská Bystrica, having already provided the school, which has a Chinese bilingual program with 140 students, funding of 26 000 EUR to set up the classroom.¹⁷ They have already established a similar Confucius Classroom at the Slovak Agricultural University in Nitra in 2018. The Slovak Agricultural University received 30 000 USD in 2019 to establish the Confucius Classroom and 10 000 USD in 2020, to provide lecturers. They received this money from Chinese



partners through the Confucius Institute at Slovak University of Technology.¹⁸ The university itself did not disclose receiving any funding via the Confucius Institute which, however, seems unlikely in light of the financial flows from the Confucius Institute to other affiliated institutions.¹⁹

Another Confucius Institute in Slovakia is based at Comenius University in Bratislava. It was established in 2015 in cooperation with the Shanghai University of International business and economics.²⁰ In the past, alongside their language and cultural classes, they also provided a course on the Chinese economy, looking at topics ranging from the internal workings of the Chinese economy to international trade, and Chinese economic diplomacy.²¹ They also provide education in the Chinese language at the Alexander Dubček University in Trenčín, The Academy of Fine Arts and Design, Bratislava, and the Technical University in Zvolen.²² At the latter, CI established a Confucius Classroom in 2016. In 2020 they provided them with 20 804 EUR to finance the classroom. Comenius University did not disclose any funding from the Confucius Institute, replying to our FOIA request that the “Confucius Institute is not obliged to provide [the university] any pecuniary consideration.”²³ Similar to Slovak University of Technology, this seems unlikely in light of the other financial flows from the CI.

The Confucius Institute at the Comenius University also operates a Confucius Classroom of Chinese Wushu, which focuses alongside the usual language and culture classes also on Chinese martial arts.²⁴ Rather uncharacteristically, the classroom is not linked to any Slovak university, but a private martial arts center instead.

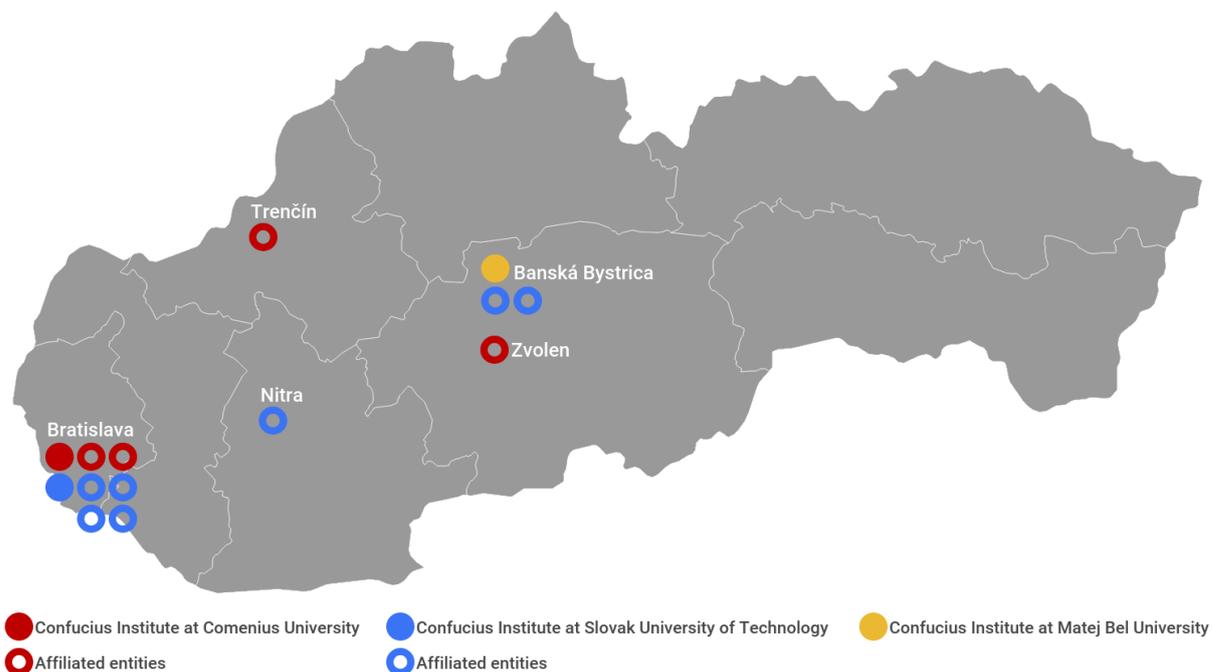
There is also the Confucius Classroom at the Slovak Medical University, which was established in 2015, in direct agreement with Hanban. Alongside the usual activities of CI, they also provide classes on ‘Traditional Chinese medicine’, including Chinese massage, acupuncture, and acupressure.²⁵ Since 2016 the university received 76 416.84 EUR from Hanban to operate the classroom. The University also has an Institute of Traditional Chinese Medicine and Acupuncture. The Institute provides a course in Traditional Chinese Medicine in cooperation with the CI at the Slovak Technical



University, and the institute's head serves as a member of the board of said Confucius Institute.²⁶

The third CI in Slovakia, the Confucius Institute for Business, is based at the University of Matej Bel in Banská Bystrica and operates in cooperation with the Dongbei University of Finance and Economics since 2018²⁷. In 2019, the university received 124 807.17 EUR from the Confucius Institute, which according to available information is the most of any CIs. They also received education materials from the organization under the Chinese Ministry of Education (Hanban).²⁸ Their activities are similar to those of other Confucius Institutes, with language and culture classes creating the bulk of their day to day activities.²⁹ However, what makes this Confucius Institute important, is the fact that the Faculty of Political Science and International Relations of the Matej Bel University (a university, where this CI is based) is regarded as one of the main schools, from which future Slovak diplomats and security experts come.³⁰

Figure 6: Networks of Confucius Institutes operating in Slovakia (source: CEIAS)





The Confucius Institutes also hold public language and art classes, as well as celebrations of Chinese holidays, weeks of Chinese culture, exhibitions of Chinese art, various competitions, lectures as well as Days of Confucius Institutes. At many of the cultural events, the Chinese ambassador to Slovakia is present.³¹ For example one of the exhibitions, organized in cooperation with the Chinese embassy, was named “Chinese story – Chinese Tibet” and it portrayed Tibet following the Chinese narrative, going so far as stating that Tibet has been an inseparable part of China since the 13th century.³² This exhibition was held at many places; including the Faculty of Arts of Comenius University,³³ the Slovak Agricultural University,³⁴ and the Gallery of Miloš Alexander Bazovský in Trenčín.³⁵

While currently in Slovakia, there are no reports of censorship or self-censorship related to the Confucius Institutes, the sheer lack of any public scrutiny over the activities of CIs is rather worrying. To help prevent potential future harm, CIs must become more transparent, especially in the areas of their financing and hiring processes. It is also important that CIs don't become the only source of knowledge of China in Slovak academia and the public sphere. The fact they generally avoid topics controversial to the Chinese government is a reason for concern. Presenting Tibet as an ‘inseparable part of China since the 13th century’ amounts to propaganda based on a misinterpretation of historical interactions between Imperial China and Tibet.³⁶

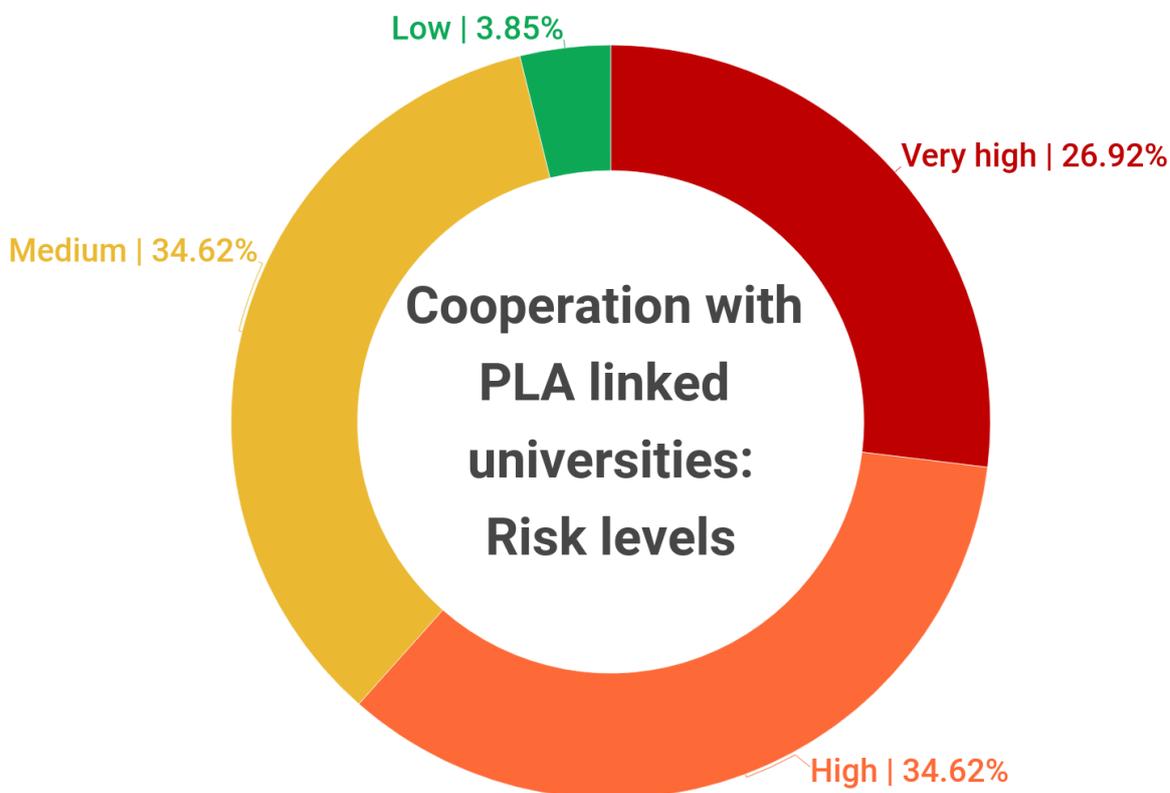


4 Military ties

A pioneering study by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) has revealed a list of Chinese universities closely collaborating with the People's Liberation Army (PLA) on defense-related research.³⁷ Universities listed on the ASPI China Defense Universities Tracker are categorized according to the risk level, possession of security credentials, a track record of espionage, and other criteria.

From the 113 academic interactions between Slovakia and China, 25 happen with Chinese academic institutions in various ways linked to the PLA. Over 60% of these relations are with universities categorized by ASPI as either 'high risk' or 'very high risk'.

Figure 7: Share of interactions with PLA linked universities according to ASPI risk assessment (source: CEIAS &ASPI)





4.1 Seven Sons of National Defense

Among the relationships with very high-risk universities, ties to the ‘Seven Sons of National Defense’³⁸ feature prominently. Slovak Academy of Science cooperates with the Northwestern Polytechnical University. Technical University in Zvolen works with the Nanjing University of Science and Technology. Both the University of Žilina and the Technical University in Košice maintain relations with the Beijing Institute of Technology.

All of these Chinese universities are regarded as ‘very high risk’ by the ASPI China Defense University Tracker and possess ‘top secret’ security credentials.

In 2015, the Slovak Academy of Science (SAS) signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Northwestern Polytechnical University (NWPU) in Xi’an. This was followed up by the signing of the Agreement on Establishing a Joint Research Center in May 2019.³⁹

Seven Sons of National Defense:

A group of leading Chinese technical universities under the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology. They are strongly involved in research and development of defense technology and are amongst the best funded universities in China. On average, over 30% of their graduates go on to be employed by China’s defense research sector.

The Seven Sons of National Defense consist of:

- Beijing Institute of Technology
- Beihang University
- Harbin Engineering University
- Harbin Institute of Technology
- Nanjing University of Aeronautics and Astronautics
- Nanjing University of Science and Technology
- Northwestern Polytechnical University



The establishment of the center was initiated by SAS. Upon conclusion of the agreement, SAS described it as “especially important and both scientifically and economically beneficial for SAS.”⁴⁰ SAS failed to publish the agreement in the Central Registry of Contracts.

Despite that, SAS did not disclose receiving any funding from the Northwestern Polytechnical University. The 2019 agreement however mandates that SAS scientists visiting the Chinese university are entitled to monthly stipend ranging from 15 000 RMB (1 900 EUR) to 35 000 RMB (4 450 EUR).⁴¹

Under the agreement, NWPU is entitled to own a 50% share of any intellectual property rights produced under the joint research. This includes research in areas like:

- Materials science
- Mechanical engineering
- Experimental medicine
- Biosciences and biomedicine
- Chemistry
- Electrical engineering
- Astronomical and Aerospace engineering
- Marine technology

NWPU’s defense research is strongly oriented towards the development (and production via a subsidiary) of unmanned drones.⁴²

Already in 2001 (i.e. long before the current tensions), U.S. designated the NWPU on the Department of Commerce Entity List due to national security concerns. In 2018, NWPU was implicated in a criminal investigation of industrial espionage by the U.S. Department of Justice.⁴³

Technical University in Zvolen maintains relations with the Nanjing University of Science and Technology, especially in the field of fire safety. In 2017, researchers from both universities received funding from the



Slovak Research and Development Agency for the project “Flammability and Fire Behavior Research of Selected Polymers for Energy Efficient Buildings.” The research was to be conducted between January 2018 and December 2019.⁴⁴

During this time, the two universities solidified their relationship by signing a pair of cooperation agreements: a Memorandum of Understanding on Academic Cooperation and Exchange,⁴⁵ and a Letter of Mutual Intent to Cooperate.⁴⁶

The Letter of Intent was signed in order to cooperate on another project, which the Technical University in Zvolen filed with the Slovak Research and Development Agency. The agency did not support the project in the end.⁴⁷

Both the Technical University in Košice and the University of Žilina maintain partnerships with the Beijing Institute of Technology (BIT).⁴⁸ Both universities failed to publish agreements with BIT in the Central Registry of Contracts. As a result, not much information is available about relations with BIT.

Cooperation between the University of Žilina and BIT has been established already in 2007.⁴⁹ As this was before the adoption of a crucial FOIA amendment which created the Central Registry of Contract, the University of Žilina did not have a legal obligation to publish the agreement with BIT online.

In 2018, Technical University in Košice awarded an honorary doctorate to BIT professor Kaoru Hirota for contributing to developing international cooperation with the Technical University in Košice and promoting education in the fields of artificial intelligence and intelligent robotics.⁵⁰



Figure 8: List of relations between Slovak academic entities and Chinese academic entities with ties to defense sector (source: CEIAS & ASPI)

Slovak entity	Chinese entity	Risk assessment	Security clearance	Record of Espionage
Comenius University	Nanjing University	Medium	Secret	
Košice University of Technology	South China University of Technology	Medium	Secret	
Košice University of Technology	University of Science and Technology of China	Medium		
Košice University of Technology	Xi'an University of Technology	Very High	Secret	
Košice University of Technology	Beijing Institute of Technology	Very High	Top Secret	
Matej Bel University	Tianjin University	High	Secret	Yes
Matej Bel University	Nanjing Normal University	Medium		
SAS Institute of Electrical Engineering	Shanghai Jiao Tong University	High	Secret	Yes
SAS Institute of Electrical Engineering	Tsinghua University	Very High	Secret	Yes
SAS Institute of Experimental Physics	Lanzhou University	Medium	Secret	
SAS Institute of Experimental Physics	Fudan University	Medium		
SAS Institute of Experimental Physics	University of Science and Technology of China	Medium		
SAS Institute of Experimental Physics	Huazhong University of Science and Technology	Very High	Secret	
SAS Institute of Oriental Studies	Zhejiang university	High	Secret	Yes
SAS Institute of Oriental Studies	Suzhou University	Medium	Secret	
SAS Institute of Physics	University of Science and Technology Beijing	High	Secret	
Slovak Academy of Science (SAS)	Northwestern Polytechnical University	Very High	Top Secret	Yes
Slovak University of Agriculture	Tianjin University	High	Secret	Yes
Slovak University of Technology	Tianjin University	High	Secret	Yes
Slovak University of Technology	Beijing University of Chemical Technology	High	Secret	
Slovak University of Technology	Shandong University of Technology	Low		
Slovak University of Technology	Shanghai University	Medium	Secret	
University of Economics	Tianjin University	High	Secret	Yes
University of Žilina	Beijing Institute of Technology	Very High	Top Secret	
Zvolen University of Technology	Nanjing University of Science and Technology	Very High	Top Secret	



4.2 Military-academic-corporate nexus reaches Slovakia

Academic cooperation with China's military-linked entities does not happen at the university-to-university level only, but also with Chinese corporations working on development for the military.

The Technical University in Košice maintains cooperation with the Wuhan Institute of Digital Engineering.⁵¹ The institute, also known as the 709 Institute, is associated with the China State Shipbuilding Corporation (CSSC).⁵²

CSSC, as the name suggests, is a state-owned enterprise working in the field of shipbuilding and marine engineering.

As China's premier institute working on the development of computer systems, the 709 Institute has been cooperating on the development of the H/ZKJ series of combat data and management systems for the PLA Navy.⁵³

Even though the Technical University in Košice signed a cooperation agreement with the 709 Institute,⁵⁴ the agreement was not published in the Central Registry of Contracts.



5 Ties with Chinese corporations

A special issue to be considered, besides the direct ties of academic institutions, are relations of Slovak universities and research organizations with Chinese corporations. Within the Chinese economy, which can be characterized as state-dominated capitalism, corporations play an integral part in the country's domestic and foreign policy. Moreover, in a drive to secure its dominating position within the overall country governance, the Chinese Communist Party ensures that it has a direct or indirect ability to influence the actions of Chinese corporations.

Among such tools are for example:

- control of state-owned enterprises by the Chinese government and their adherence to the leading role of the Chinese Communist Party
- establishment of party cells as an integral part of the corporations (mandatory also for foreign corporations operating in China and Chinese corporations operating abroad)
- obligation to aid the intelligence apparatus under the National security law

These three issues create a relatively high level of risk that ties of these companies with the universities and research organizations can be used and abused to achieve the fulfillment of China's 'core interests'. The risk is higher especially in the case of cooperation on technical and natural sciences.

While universities so far seem to be ignorant of this risk, the Slovak security apparatus is slowly recognizing these risks. In the latest issue of the Slovak government's Report on the Security of the Slovak Republic (2019), it was noted that Chinese intelligence services and other entities have been attempting to gain access to sectors, which can be a source of information usable for achieving China's economic development (a 'core interest').



Our analysis of the ties of the Slovak universities and research institutes with Chinese entities revealed that they maintain formal ties with at least three controversial Chinese companies: Huawei, ZTE, and Dahua Technology. All three companies are active in the ICT and surveillance sectors.

5.1 Huawei to the frontline

Among the Chinese tech companies, Huawei has the most active presence in Slovak academia. Huawei and its Slovak subsidiary maintain research partnerships with Technical University in Košice, University of Žilina, as well as with the SAS Institute of Materials Research in Košice.

The University of Žilina established a relationship with Huawei already in 2016 when the two parties signed a research agreement, covering the fields of the internet of things, intelligent systems, information technologies, and communication networks. As a rule of thumb, Huawei is entitled to claim intellectual property rights to any research outcomes if it shall desire so.⁵⁵ Under the research agreement, Huawei donated to the university equipment for conducting applied research. In 2017, a Safe City research lab has been launched at the university in cooperation with Huawei.⁵⁶ The university described the cooperation as an “extraordinary partnership for the future.”⁵⁷

Technical University in Košice has also concluded a cooperation agreement with Huawei. As the agreement has not been made public, not much information is available about the partnership.

Since 2019, the SAS Institute of Materials Research located in Košice also cooperates with Huawei on the research of insulation coating for metal material development. The two parties also concluded a non-disclosure agreement per which “neither party shall publish the partnership between the parties in any way, through any media, or any channel, express or implied, including but not limited to, official websites, newspapers, broadcasts, television, and magazines.”⁵⁸ Indeed, no mentions of the cooperation exist on the institute’s website or in the media. Nevertheless, the Slovak Freedom of Information Act supersedes non-disclosure agreements, and thus both



the non-disclosure agreement and the research agreement were published in the Central Registry of Contracts. The research agreement, however, was so heavily redacted that no information on the conditions of the cooperation is available.

Huawei's activities in the Slovak academic sector go beyond research cooperation. Since 2016, Huawei has extended its flagship CSR program "Seeds for the Future" to Slovakia. The groundwork for providing support to Slovak students of ICT was laid a year earlier, when a memorandum of understanding was signed between Huawei and the Slovak Ministry of Education in November 2015.⁵⁹

Since then, students from the Technical University in Košice, University of Žilina, Slovak University of Technology, and Comenius University have participated in the program.

About Huawei Technologies:

Huawei Technologies is one of the world's largest producers and providers of information and communication technologies. Huawei's importance in the last few years has been tied to its involvement in developing, deploying, and implementing 5G networks. It is also the world's 2nd largest smartphone seller.

According to the US officials, Huawei can secretly access mobile phone networks through 'backdoors' originally for use by law enforcement. In the past, it has also been implicated in the unauthorized data transfer from the headquarters of the African Union to China. One of Huawei's employees has been arrested and indicted in Poland on espionage charges. In 2019, the company has been charged by the US Department of Justice with committing bank fraud by alleged violation of Iran sanctions. In 2020, the Federal Communications Commission designated Huawei a national security threat. A similar warning was issued by the Czech National Cyber and Information Security Agency in 2018. Due to potential security risks, Huawei has been banned from several countries' 5G networks. These include the US, the UK, Australia, or New Zealand. In the last 2 years, many world-class universities cut their ties with Huawei, including MIT, Stanford, UC Berkeley, or the University of Oxford.



5.2 ZTE: A failed research center in Bratislava?

In 2015, two prominent Slovak universities – Slovak University of Technology and Comenius University (both located in Bratislava) – signed a letter of intent (LoI) to cooperate with the Chinese company ZTE Corporation and Slovak company Sinocon.⁶⁰ Despite the cooperation agreement falling under the scope of the FOIA requests, we filed with the two universities, neither of them disclosed the conclusion of the LoI.

Sinocon, now undergoing a wind-up process, was at the time of the LoI signing headed by Anton Novák, a lawyer and a member of the board of oversight of the Confucius Institute based at the Slovak University of Technology.⁶¹

The purpose of the LoI was to establish a ZTE Service, Research and Development Center in Slovakia. The Center was supposed to be based at the joint research center of Comenius University and Slovak University of Technology, established until the end of 2020, and focus on:

- Internet of Things
- Biotechnology and Bioinformatics
- Intelligent Systems
- Information Technologies and Communication Networks
- Health, demographic change and well-being

To implement the project, ZTE was to especially provide financial coverage of the project and strategic research direction, while the two universities were to provide research personnel and related infrastructure.

According to the press release by the Slovak University of Technology, the investment of ZTE into the new research center was supposed to be in the amount of 20 million EUR and create 100 workplaces.⁶²

Under the terms of the agreement, ZTE would have the legal capacity to engage in transfers of intellectual property and technology which was



developed by the Slovak scientists working on research projects under the ZTE Center.

Interestingly, while the signing of the Lol in 2015 received moderate media coverage, there have been no mentions of the ZTE center in the Slovak media since, suggesting the center is not yet operational.

About ZTE Corporation:

ZTE Corporation is the world's leading telecommunications and information technology company. In the last few years, ZTE's importance rose due to its involvement in the development, deployment, and implementation of 5G networks.

In 2018, the USA banned ZTE from buying US-made parts, after an investigation into ZTE's sales to North Korea and Iran found they supposedly violated sanctions against those countries. After negotiations, as well as a scramble between the US administration and Senate over changing this ban into a 1 billion USD fine, compromise, under which ZTE would be banned from acquiring US government contracts. In the same year, ZTE has been flagged by a British cybersecurity watchdog, the National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC), as a potential risk to national security. In 2020, the Federal Communications Commission designated ZTE (along with Huawei) a National Security threat, due to its close ties with the Chinese government, as well as its disregard for US National Security Laws, and risks and vulnerabilities in its equipment. Similar warning was issued by the Czech National Cyber and Information Security Agency already in 2018. Some US universities, including MIT and UC San Diego, have previously cut ties with ZTE due to security concerns.



5.3 Dahua: Ignoring the human rights abuses

In April 2018, Alexander Dubček University in Trenčín signed a Memorandum of Understanding and Mutual Cooperation with Dahua Technology Czech, a Prague based subsidiary of Chinese tech and surveillance company Dahua Technology.⁶³

Under the memorandum, the two parties agreed to “support direct contact and cooperation in the fields of education, research, and development between their employees and students.”

Under the agreement, the parties vowed to cooperate on both basic and applied research in fields, which can be regarded as cutting edge technology:

- Development of new materials
- Advanced technologies
- Drone technology
- Renewable energy
- Information technology
- Artificial intelligence

Even though the cooperation of the two entities after the signing of the memorandum appears to be dormant for now, it showcases the problems posed by universities not engaging in any sort of risk assessment when it comes to China. Alexander Dubček University in Trenčín itself stated it does not engage in any sort of risk assessment when dealing with Chinese institutions.

Already before the conclusion of the memorandum, global media and rights organizations reported that Dahua (and other Chinese tech companies like Hikvision) were implicated in the surveillance and oppression of Uyghurs living in the Xinjiang Autonomous Region.⁶⁴



A year after the memorandum was signed, in 2019, Dahua has been put onto United States' sanctions 'Entity list', due to the complicity in Uyghur mistreatment.

An exercise of a standardized risk assessment protocol (akin to the 'know your customer' regime which certain regulated professions need to follow when interacting with clients) could have revealed the human rights-related controversies surrounding Dahua, which the university could then reflect on before signing the memorandum or in making a decision to cancel it.

About Dahua Technology:

Dahua Technology is surveillance equipment and CCTV maker. They 'offer end-to-end security solutions, systems, and services to create values for city operations, corporate management, and consumers'. While being largely unknown in the world, it is the second-largest surveillance equipment maker in China.

According to the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, Dahua won multimillion-dollar contracts from local Xinjiang authorities to build systems to surveil streets and mosques. Due to being implicated in human rights violations and abuses against Uyghur, Kazakh, and other Muslim minority groups in Xinjiang, in 2019 Dahua has also been put onto United States' sanctions 'Entity list'. Recently, it has been found to be possibly helping target Uyghurs using advanced AI recognition based on identifiable characteristics. In past, Dahua has also been found to be lacking in the security of its devices on several occasions. In 2019, Dahua devices were found to be able to capture audio without authorization, even with audio being disabled. The researcher who found this vulnerability warned they could be used as anyone's listening devices, simply by being connected directly to the internet. In 2017, Dahua faced a similar issue, where their devices could be accessed and modified through a backdoor vulnerability.



6 Trajectories of future development

As the previous chapters demonstrated, contrary to the popular belief, China is quite present in Slovak academia. Looking at how Chinese presence in the academic sectors' of other countries developed, and what are the contentious issues, can offer insights into how Chinese inroads in Slovak academia may evolve in the coming years.

Chinese involvement in foreign universities and academia is visible in many countries, but recently the controversy has been most pronounced in Australia, a country whose universities are largely dependent on Chinese students.⁶⁵

The Australian government has launched a probe into foreign influence in its academia in late August 2020.⁶⁶ This probe is supposed to look into the “nature and extent to which foreign actors are interfering in Australian universities, including staff and student bodies, publicly funded research agencies, and competitive research grant agencies.”⁶⁷ According to Australia’s Education Minister, a part of it is also going to be an inquiry into Australian academics’ involvement in the Thousand Talents Plan.⁶⁸ The Thousand Talents Plan is a Chinese government program designed to attract scientists and engineers from overseas. Since the plan began in 2008, it has recruited thousands of researchers from countries including the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, Singapore, Canada, Japan, France, and Australia.⁶⁹ It recently became controversial due to an FBI arrest of a prestigious Harvard professor, who allegedly lied about his involvement in the program.⁷⁰

Supposedly the probe should also look into the extent, to which foreign actors influence free speech at universities.⁷¹ This is most likely tied to recent events at the Universities of Queensland and New South Wales. At the University of Queensland, one of the students was expelled following him supporting the Hong Kong protests and criticizing the Chinese Communist Party.⁷² The University of New South Wales has been recently mired in accusations of censorship, following the decision to delete social



media posts promoting an article critical of Beijing's crackdown on Hong Kong.⁷³ However, this only includes the most recent issues regarding relations between Chinese and Australian universities.

During the last couple of years, there have been many other similar cases, including canceled screenings of films critical of Confucius Institutes, a panel discussion on Chinese politics being canceled ahead of Chinese state visits or courses at the University of Queensland being developed and co-founded in partnership with Confucius Institute.⁷⁴ Even back in 2013, the University of Sydney canceled the Dalai Lama's visit, to protect Chinese funding for its Confucius Institute.⁷⁵

The controversy of Chinese presence in academia has also become apparent in the United States. Most recently, in August 2020, the Department of State has designated Confucius Institutes as a foreign mission,⁷⁶ requiring their staff to register and adhere to restrictions.⁷⁷ Confucius Institutes also came under fire in 2017, after the National Association of Scholars released a report according to which Confucius Institutes are potentially harmful to the U.S. universities.⁷⁸ They are supposedly failing to uphold Intellectual freedom and transparency. The report also states that CIs serve as a way of 'entangling' U.S. universities with China, and as a tool of soft-power. The FBI also deems cooperation with Chinese institutions to be potentially harmful to academia and the U.S. economy.⁷⁹ It points out that Chinese institutions adhere to different academic rules, often being neglectful of plagiarism, and are often under the direct influence of the Chinese government, which is keen to use students or researchers for economic espionage or collecting intellectual property. Due to this and the increased scrutiny of Chinese activities in the United States currently, there are 67 Confucius institutes, out of which 5 are currently scheduled to be closed until the end of 2021. Overall during the last 6 years, due to various reasons, there were 50 Confucius Institutes closed in the US.⁸⁰

As of late, the European Union became more involved in tackling foreign interference in higher education and research. In 2019, the Directorate-General for Research and Innovation organized an event, in which the EU



Member States as well as relevant stakeholders came together and discussed ways in which they should further cooperate with China in the areas of Research and Innovation. The participants decided to eventually establish a set of guidelines to identify and tackle foreign interference.⁸¹ While these guidelines would tackle foreign interference in this area in general, their link with China is not only important because of the meeting from which they arose being focused on China. This is due to not only the number of research cooperation ties between EU member state institutions and Chinese institutions significantly growing as of late, but also due to China being the number one source of international students to the EU, making up 18.2% of international graduate students in 2017.⁸²

Earlier this year, in April 2020, Sweden, the country which opened the first Confucius Institute in Europe back in 2005 also became the first country in Europe to close all of them.⁸³ This has been happening amidst the deterioration of previously warm ties between Sweden and China. There is also the case of Belgium and the Confucius Institute at Vrije University. Its director was accused of “acting as a recruiter for Chinese intelligence services and hiring informants from the Chinese students and business communities in Belgium.”⁸⁴ Following this, the Institute was closed, as the hosting university announced that said cooperation was “not in line with [our] principles of free research.”⁸⁵ In the United Kingdom, relations with China have been worsening during the last couple of years, mainly due to the Chinese clampdown in Hong Kong. When it comes to higher education and academia, in 2019 the House of Commons released a report, warning of Chinese influence on UK universities.⁸⁶ According to it, amongst others, there are examples of already invited speakers being stood down, or senior academics being asked to not make political comments based on pressure from the Chinese embassy. Ties between British universities and Huawei have also been scrutinized, with the Oxford university suspending research funding from Huawei.⁸⁷ The Centre for the Protection of National Infrastructure, a government agency has also published a ‘Trusted research guidance’ for academia, where it explains numerous ways to protect the integrity of the research.⁸⁸ It also mentions the fact that since 2017, ‘Chinese intelligence agencies are allowed to compel Chinese organizations or individuals to carry out work on their behalf and provide support’.



Lastly, there is Czechia, where 3 members of the Charles' Universities' faculty of social sciences were fired over previously undisclosed payments by the Chinese embassy.⁸⁹ University discovered they had set up a private company, which was paid by the Chinese embassy for conferences which they co-organized. After this event transpired, it was found out that a voluntary subject at Charles university which was taught by Milos Balaban, one of the 3 fired faculty members, and the head of the universities' Centre for Security Policy, was funded by the Chinese embassy.⁹⁰ There have also been other smaller incidents, where some universities had to censor certain topics due to Chinese influence.⁹¹



7 Conclusion & recommendations

Over the years, China has made considerable inroads into Slovak academia. Increased interest in academic cooperation came around with the establishment of the 17+1 platform and the Belt and Road Initiative.

It would be too simplistic to claim that cooperation establishment has been driven by China only. Domestic interest in the cooperation, multiplied by a low perception of risks and perceived higher standard of research and education at Chinese universities, has often been a crucial factor driving the engagement.

Cooperation with Chinese entities suffers from a low level of transparency. Less than half of concluded cooperation agreements are published in the Central Registry of Contracts. Despite potential technology transfers from publicly funded institutions, current laws do not require Chinese entities (especially corporations) to disclose their beneficial owners, as is the case with other types of relations where publicly funded entities provide valuable consideration to private parties.

Generally, universities and the Slovak Academy of Science do not engage in a systemic risk assessment before and during cooperation with China. This is largely due to low sensitivity towards risks posed by China.

Cooperation is focused mostly on hard sciences. Around three-quarters of mutual interactions happen with Slovak academic institutions focusing on natural sciences and technology.

Currently, three Confucius Institutes operated at Slovak universities: Comenius University, Slovak University of Technology, and Matej Bel University. They are active mostly in language education and cultural promotion, but also in Chinese traditional medicine, and education in Chinese politics and economy. Confucius Institutes at Comenius University and the Slovak University of Technology engage in activities at several other universities and high schools around Slovakia.



From the 113 academic interactions between Slovakia and China, 25 happen with Chinese academic institutions in various ways linked to the People's Liberation Army. Over 60% of these relations are with universities categorized 'high risk' or 'very high risk'. Connection to the Chinese military and higher risk factor do not necessarily mean that cooperation cannot happen. However, the existence of this link should be an important signal to engage in a more rigorous risk assessment and adopt enhanced risk mitigation measures. To illustrate, the cooperation of the SAS Institute of Oriental Studies with a 'high risk' Zhejiang University does not necessarily mean that the cooperation can be abused for China's gains. However, if a research institute working on cutting edge technology were to engage in cooperation with the same Chinese university, the risk of abuse would be considerably higher.

Besides universities and research institutes, Slovak academic institutions cooperate with several Chinese corporations. Three Chinese tech firms stand out here: Huawei, ZTE, and Dahua.

To tackle the challenges and minimize the risks posed by China's presence in the Slovak academic sector, the Slovak government, as well as academic institutions, should adopt several measures aimed at increasing transparency of the relations, fostering an environment where risks are regularly evaluated, and promoting domestic education in and research of China-related topics.

Many of the risks associated with cooperation with Chinese entities stem from the overall lack of transparency. Publicly financed academic institutions need to improve their transparency when it comes to cooperating with Chinese institutions. Improved transparency will allow for public oversight of Chinese activities in the academic sector. Improved transparency can be achieved by using the existing tools found in the Slovak legal system, which were originally devised to tackle the influence of oligarchs.

Firstly, academic institutions need to improve their track record on publishing their agreements and memoranda with Chinese entities in the Registry. The government should pass an amendment to the Freedom of



Information Act, which would clarify that various memoranda of understanding and letters of intent fall under the obligation to publish agreements in the Central Registry of Contracts.

Secondly, the government should revisit the obligation to publish the ultimate beneficial owners in a public registry. An amendment to the Act on Universities should mandate that foreign entities declare their beneficial owners in the Registry of Public Sector Partners before concluding a partnership with Slovak academic institutions. This obligation should exist regardless of the current transactional value census per the Act on Registry of Public Sector Partners, as the nature of these partnerships makes it virtually impossible to estimate the value of the partnership. Since research agreements concluded with universities often stipulate co-ownership or option rights to claim ownership of intellectual property, it should be clear who might benefit from intellectual property developed by Slovak universities.

Before establishing new cooperation or partnership with a Chinese entity, academic institutions should conduct a rigorous risk assessment and implement risk-mitigating measures to prevent abuse of the partnership.

To aid the risk assessment process, the Ministry of Education in cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and security apparatus should issue clear guidelines on how to evaluate risks and safely cooperate with Chinese institutions. The guidelines should include also an illustrative list of best and worst practices.

Connections to the Chinese military and complicity in human rights abuses should be among the key criteria of risk assessment. Connection to the Chinese military should be grounds for deploying enhanced risk mitigation measures (e. g. limiting the cooperation to areas that do not result in the development of dual-use technology). Complicity in human rights abuses should always result in termination of the cooperation as a commitment or enabling of mass atrocity crimes is in absolute contrast to the basic values enshrined in the Constitution of the Slovak Republic.



The results of the risk assessment should be taken into account also when making decisions about awarding research funding from Slovak resources for joint research with Chinese academic institutions. In case of evaluation resulting in a higher risk assessment, funding should always be conditional on the adoption of specific, pre-approved countermeasures.

A specific issue to consider is the financing of China-focused education and research. Slovak academic institutions should not rely on China-provided funding and expertise to educate future generations of China experts (not only sinologists, but also China-focused economy, international relations, and other experts).

Academic institutions should thus reconsider the scope of future cooperation with the Confucius Institutes. As a bare minimum, they should take steps to limit the Confucius Institutes' activities to language education and cultural promotion only, and not engage in policy-related activities (including policy-focused research, education, and advocacy).

As China is becoming an increasingly important actor in global affairs, affecting Slovakia as well, the government should allocate resources to build up a domestic China expertise and education programs. EU funding may be a useful source for establishing a research program in applied China studies which could provide expertise to policymakers from various levels of government. This could take the form of a dedicated center of excellence in modern China.



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List of abbreviations

17+1	Cooperation between China and Central and Eastern European Countries
ASPI	Australian Strategic Policy Institute
BIT	Beijing Institute of Technology
CEE	Central and Eastern Europe
CI	Confucius Institute
CSSC	China State Shipbuilding Corporation
FOIA	Freedom of Information Act (Slovak Act no. 211/200 Coll. on Free Access to Information)
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
NWPU	Northwestern Polytechnical University
PLA	People's Liberation Army
RMB	Renmimibi
SAS	Slovak Academy of Science



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China's inroads into Slovak universities: Protecting academic freedoms from authoritarian malign interference

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