

GREAT EXPECTATIONS: CHINA'S IMAGE IN POLISH MAINSTREAM MEDIA AND AMONG ELITES



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Analysis

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About the project

This policy paper has been written in the framework of [ChinfluenCE](#) – an international project devoted to mapping China's perception and influence in Central Europe through first, looking at the China's image as conveyed by Czech, Hungarian, Polish and Slovak media, and second, analyzing who speaks within the discourse. It identifies main narratives in Polish media outlets regarding the Middle Kingdom, as well as agenda setters (politicians, experts, academics, journalists, representatives of public administration and business) who most actively shape the public debate about China in Poland.

The Polish team joined the project, which has been running since 2017, only at the end of 2018, adopting the methodology that had been created by the project leader, [Association for International Affairs](#) (AMO) from the Czech Republic. [Central and Eastern European Center for Asian Studies](#) from Hungary and [Institute of Asian Studies](#) from Slovakia are the two other V4 project partners. The results of the Czech, Hungarian and Slovak media research have already been published earlier at <https://www.chinfluence.eu/>.

Summary

- Unlike in the other three Visegrad countries, the Polish media discourse on China **was exceptionally positive** in the analyzed period of seven and half years (2010-06/2018).
- **58%** of articles published in mainstream media outlets were evaluated as **neutral**, **39% as positive**, and only **3% as negative**.
- Centre for International Relation's (CSM) researchers studied and coded **2089 media outputs** concerning the subject of "China" in economic and/or political context, identifying **97 key agenda setters**¹ for further analysis.
- Most of the key agenda setters were **journalists or politicians**, only to a lesser extent academics or China experts.
- The **intensification of Sino-Polish relations** contributed to the **increase in coverage** of China-related issues, with a special emphasis placed on **highest-rank official state visits**.
- Topics regarding **Sino-Polish economic relations** – also in the framework of international formats, such as the Belt and Road Initiative, or 16+1 (now 17+1) platform – and China's economic and investment presence in Poland prevailed in the media discourse.
- The **Belt and Road Initiative**, **Polish export to China**, and **state visits to China** ranked three most popular key words.
- Official **rhetoric of decision makers** was not consistent with the actual state of Sino-Polish economic and political relations in the analyzed period.
- The predominant **image of China** presented in the Polish media **was idealized**, concentrating upon potential **benefits resulting from the Sino-Polish relations**, despite the lack of actual data to confirm hypothetical profits.
- Among the Polish public opinion, such a narrative **created exaggerated expectations** regarding the importance of co-operation with China, as well as **false perception** of the actual impact of political cooperation between Warsaw and Beijing.
- **Thorough and comprehensive articles** covering the broader picture of China-related issues **were outnumbered by no-name general mentions**, often replicating the same agency's wire.

¹ In line with the project's methodology, the researchers limited the number of agenda setters by focusing only on actors cited at least three times in the analyzed period.

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Recommendations:

- **The coverage of China in the Polish media should be demythologized**, based upon the actual outcome of Sino-Polish economic and political relations (as well as broader geopolitical considerations) rather than wishful thinking.
- Whereas China has been a topic of numerous open and closed expert debates with the participation of specialists from academic world, governmental and independent think tanks, public administration as well as journalists, **a thorough public discussion about desirable strategies for Poland, taking into consideration both opportunities and challenges of cooperation with China** – the second largest world economy actively engaged in numerous huge-scale initiatives in our region – is needed².
- **Media should be supported in delivering informed and objective coverage of China.** Reports, analyses, commentaries, publications, and other expertise regarding China created by the expert circles – as well as the experts themselves – should be fully used by journalists.
- **The role of China in the world politics and economy** should not be neglected in the Polish public discourse.
- Work towards **strengthening realistic expectations held by the local business communities** should be carried, with a special emphasis upon their better understanding of Chinese investments strategies and tactics.
- Decision makers should be **more transparent** (and media should make them accountable) on their actual intentions regarding the extend of Poland's cooperation with China.
- **Political parties** should work out their **vision of relations with China**.
- **A consistent strategy of contacts with China** and the best formula of economic and trade relations is needed in Poland.

² This has become even more crucial nowadays with the necessity to select a 5G network technology provider.

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The evolution of Sino-Polish relations

To understand the discourse on China that took place in the Polish media throughout the analyzed period (2010-06/2018), it is important to grasp the outline of the two countries' relations. Although over the last 70 years Poland has made many "firsts" in Chinese history: established diplomatic ties with the new authorities in the People's Republic of China as early as in 1949, set up the first joint venture in China in 1951 (that still successfully exists today), and was the pioneer to sign a cultural cooperation agreement with China the very same year, for many decades even during the socialist times the Sino-Polish relations were not very developed.³

On 4 June 1989, when after sixty one years the first (partly) free elections were held in Poland, and the country started the process of transition into democracy and market economy, China's Communist Party unleashed the Army on protesters in Beijing's Tiananmen Square to break a pro-democracy students' movement⁴. Over the next two decades, this symbolic date had been perceived as a burden overshadowing bilateral relations between Poland and China.⁵ On the other hand, Poland, like other Central and Eastern European Countries, focused on "joining" the West, whereas Beijing did not consider this region be its

³ Dr Małgorzata Bonikowska, Agnieszka Ostrowska, Comparing the Czech-Polish Approach to China: Assessing both Challenges and opportunities from a Security-Minded Perspective, Prague Security Studies Institute and Centre for International Relations, Prague, 2017; http://www.pssi.cz/download/docs/519_final-study-comparing-the-czech-polish-approach-to-china.pdf

⁴ Kevin McSpadden, June 4, 1989 Is Not Just the Date of the Tiananmen Massacre but of Many Other Bloody Crackdowns Across China, Time, 4.06.2015, <http://time.com/3908456/tiananmen-massacre-china-chengdu-june-4-1989/>

⁵ Bogdan J. Góralczyk, Poland on the Route of the Chinese Silk Road: A Chance for Development or Just a Challenge?, In: New Structural Policy in an Open Market Economy, pp.213-232, University of Warsaw Faculty of Management Press, Warsaw 2018; http://www.wz.uw.edu.pl/portaleFiles/6133-wydawnictwo-new_structural_2018/New_Structural_Policy_1.pdf

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major external partner. Meanwhile, China was slowly growing into a position of a global player.⁶

At a time of a world financial crisis, Polish political elites started to realize the potential of “the rising powers, especially China”, as well as the need to get to know Chinese language and culture – the skill that had been for a long time neglected in the diplomatic service.⁷ Prime Minister Donald Tusk paid an official visit to China in 2008, taking part in the Polish-Chinese Economic Forum the ASEM summit. However, Sino-Polish ties gained momentum in December 2011 when the Strategic Partnership agreement was signed in Beijing by Polish President Bronisław Komorowski and Chinese President Hu Jintao, and Poland joined a group of (at that time) seven EU countries that had upgraded their relationship with China to this level.⁸

In the aftermath of these events, the Polish government, aware of the huge opportunities arising from China dynamic economic growth, launched (in 2012) Go China – a strategy of developing economic cooperation with China. The initiative of the Ministry of Economy was to be implemented by Polish Trade and Investment Promotion Sections in Shanghai and Beijing, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, the Ministry of Sport and Tourism, Polish Information and Foreign Investment Agency, Polish Agency for Enterprise Development and Agricultural Market Agency⁹ with the imperative to encourage Polish entrepreneurs to develop business relations with Chinese partners.

⁶ Kong Tianping, 16+1 Cooperation Framework: Genesis, Characteristics and Prospect, Institute of European Studies, CASS, Beijing, 3.12.2015; <http://16plus1-thinktank.com/1/20151203/868.html>

⁷ Radosław Sikorski, Ministry of Foreign Affairs' archive website, Exposé 2008 https://www.ms.gov.pl/pl/polityka_zagraniczna/priorytety_polityki_zagr_2017_2021/expose2/expose_2008/

⁸ Polsko-chińskie partnerstwo strategiczne, www.prezydent.pl, 20.12.2011; <https://www.prezydent.pl/archiwum-bronislawa-komorowskiego/aktualnosci/wizyty-zagraniczne/art,140,polsko-chińskie-partnerstwo-strategiczne.html>

⁹ https://www.paih.gov.pl/20120312/go_china_portal

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A historic visit of Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao to Warsaw the very same year brought about further prospects of strengthened economic cooperation, as well as raised high expectations regarding the role of Poland in a new “16+1” format which was then officially announced by the Chinese guest in the Polish capital city.¹⁰ Being a regional power with rapidly-growing market economy, a participant of multiple regional initiatives, as well as an important hub conveniently located in the transportation corridors between China and Europe, Poland seemed to be very well positioned to become the prospective leader of the initiative.¹¹

All that created a favorable political atmosphere for Poland's engagement in the China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), launched by President Xi Jinping in Astana in September 2013. Polish perspective on the project focused on potential economic and political benefits that could arise from the country's participation in BRI.¹² Similarly to other countries in Central and Eastern Europe, Poland hoped to receive a significant share of Chinese investments, while at the same time competed with its neighbors for the title of being the "gate to Europe" for China – the notion that at some point was also promoted by the Chinese.¹³

China became the first Asian country that Polish President Andrzej Duda visited soon after taking office in November 2015, demonstrating “the importance of the Polish-Chinese strategic partnership” as well as his “willingness to create conditions enhancing the development of bilateral cooperation in areas such as trade, investment, culture, science, education and tourism”.¹⁴ The following year, during the President Xi Jinping's visit to Poland, Warsaw and

¹⁰ Bruno Surdel, Chinese investments in Poland. No expansion on the horizon, Centre for International Relations, Warsaw, 2019

¹¹ Łukasz Sarek, The “16+1” Initiative and Poland's Disengagement from China, in: China Brief Volume: 19 Issue: 4, 15.02.2019; <https://jamestown.org/program/the-161-initiative-and-polands-disengagement-from-china/>

¹² Partycja Pendrakowska, Poland's perspective on the Belt and Road Initiative, in: Journal of Contemporary East Asia Studies, Volume 7, 2018 - Issue 2; <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/24761028.2018.1552491>

¹³ http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-05/12/c_136277691.htm

¹⁴ Poland's President to visit China, szanghaj.msz.gov.pl, 21.11.2015; <https://szanghaj.msz.gov.pl/en/news/poland-s-president-to-visit-china>

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Beijing upgraded their ties to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, and the two presidents jointly greeted the arrival of the first China Railway Express train that arrived at the Warsaw PKP CARGO Terminal, symbolically inaugurating the opening of the New Silk Road.¹⁵

However, a meaningful dissonance between official rhetoric and the actual decisions influencing the Sino-Polish cooperation could be observed in January 2017, when Polish Minister of National Defense Antoni Macierewicz blocked the sale of land for a logistic hub that meant to be a part of BRI, which for many commentators was a clear signal that Poland may regard the New Silk Road initiative as a threat to the country's security, as well as a suspicious geopolitical concept aiming to change the global order. However, this did not stop the welcoming trend towards Chinese investment originated by the previous government and represented above all by Poland's local governments eager to reap the benefits of this large-scale project.¹⁶

It is noteworthy that despite the great expectations regarding the benefits of Sino-Polish rapprochement, Poland did not develop a comprehensive vision of relations with China. The most essential questions that have been asked since the beginning of an intensification of economic cooperation still have not been fully answered: what should be the strategy of contacts with China and the optimum formula of economic and trade relations? Will China's growing power constitute a threat to regional and transatlantic security? What values and interests should have priority in Poland's relations with China?¹⁷ Also a study of documents highlighting Polish Foreign Policy Priorities, as well as annual Minister of Foreign Affairs'

¹⁵ Federica Antonutti, The first Chinese container train at the Warsaw PKP CARGO Terminal, www.pol-rail.net, 14.02.2016; <http://www.pol-rail.net/en/il-primo-treno-container-cinese-al-terminal-pkp-cargo-di-varsavia/>

¹⁶ François Godement & Abigaël Vasselier, China at the Gates. A New Power Audit of EU-China relations, The European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR), 2017; https://www.ecfr.eu/page/-/China_Power_Audit.pdf

¹⁷ Address by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland, Radosław Sikorski, at the conference on "European Union-United States-China. How to build transatlantic understanding in relations with the emerging Asian power?", Warsaw, January 11 2008; https://www.msz.gov.pl/en/ministry/polish-diplomacy-archive/former-ministers/remarks-by-radoslaw-sikorski/page_15956

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exposés, reveals that over the last decade little attention has been devoted to relations with this newly emerging power, and strategic tasks set in respect to bilateral co-operation have been described in a general and vague way.¹⁸

The participation of Prime Minister Beata Szydło at the first BRI summit in Beijing in May 2017 gave Polish delegation a possibility to discuss – with President Xi Jinping and Prime Minister Li Keqiang – issues related to removing barriers for Polish products to Chinese market and increasing Sino-Polish trade turnover¹⁹. By that time realization among Polish political elites was growing that good relations at the highest political circles were not being transformed into real economic success. Moreover, new agreements and contracts have been signed more often at the local than at the national level. Poland has continuously been struggling with a chronic deficit in trade with the Chinese partner, and the 16+1 and BRI initiatives have changed little in this respect.²⁰ In 2017, the Polish trade deficit China amounted to over 94 billion PLN – three times more than with Russia, Poland's largest supplier of energy, and higher than in previous year, which meant a continuation of the unfavorable trade trend with China, despite more dynamic export growth.²¹ At the end of 2017, current Prime Minis-

¹⁸ In a 29-page document “Polish Foreign Policy Priorities 2012-2016”, Warsaw, March 2012, half a paragraph is devoted to “the importance of bilateral cooperation with China, our biggest economic partner in Asia, India, Japan and South Korea”, <https://www.msz.gov.pl/resource/d31571cf-d24f-4479-af09-c9a46cc85cf6:JCR>. A 25-page “Polish Foreign Policy Strategy 2017-2021” briefly declares that “Poland will continue to implement the *Go Africa* and *Go China* programmes, complementing them with similar initiatives addressed to the ASEAN countries, Iran, and India.”, as well as notes that “cooperation with China in the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative could, in the 2017 – 2020 perspective, facilitate these [Gas interconnectors, Via Carpatia, and the TEN-T Baltic-Adriatic Core Network Corridor] and similar projects.”; <https://www.msz.gov.pl/resource/0c98c3b2-9c5d-4c42-8761-f7827134ee76:JCR>.

¹⁹ Premier Beata Szydło w Pekinie: Polska wiąże duże oczekiwania z projektem Pasa i Szlaku, Polish Prime Minister's official website, 12.05.2017; <https://www.premier.gov.pl/wydarzenia/aktualnosci/premier-beata-szydlo-w-pekinie-polska-wiaze-duze-oczekiwania-z-projektem-pasa.html>

²⁰ Bogdan J. Góralczyk, Poland on the Route of the Chinese Silk Road: A Chance for Development or Just a Challenge?, In book: *New Structural Policy in an Open Market Economy*, pp.213-232, University of Warsaw Faculty of Management Press, Warsaw 2018; http://www.wz.uw.edu.pl/portaleFiles/6133-wydawnictwo-new_structural_2018/New_Structural_Policy_1.pdf

²¹ Łukasz Sarek, Poland and the EU: Seeking a Two-way Street with China, *The Warsaw Institute Review*, 30.03.2018; <https://warsawinstitute.org/poland-eu-seeking-two-way-street-china/>

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ter Mateusz Morawiecki declared that economic relations with China were “difficult”, and the Chinese market was “hermetic and closed”.²² Consequently, at the “16+1” summit in Sofia, Poland significantly lowered the rank of the delegation: the country was represented by Deputy Prime Minister Jarosław Gowin instead of Prime Minister²³. The pace of cooperation at the government level has recently slowed down. Perhaps the biggest challenge to Sino-Polish relations nowadays is a new dynamics of relations in the US-EU-China triangle, with Poland positioning itself as “a stalwart ally in Central Europe and one of the United States’ strongest partners on the continent”²⁴, which overshadows Poland’s partnership with the Middle Kingdom.

China’s image in Polish media

[Centre for International Relations](#)’ researchers analyzed and coded **2089 Polish media outputs** published **between January 2010 and June 2018** – on the subject of China in economic and/or political context. For the analysis, 20 media outlets were selected, covering the most widely read dailies (Dziennik Gazeta Prawna, Dziennik Polski, Fakt, Gazeta Polska Codziennie, Gazeta Wyborcza, Rzeczpospolita), weeklies (Angora, Do Rzeczy, Newsweek, Polityka) and news portals (onet.pl, interia.pl, wp.pl, gazeta.pl, wyborcza.pl, wyborcza.biz, rp.pl, dorzeczy.pl, 300polityka.pl, wpolityce.pl). CIR’s research team conducted both quantitative and qualitative analysis of the articles and a social network analysis of key agenda setters who influence the discourse on China in Poland.

²² Morawiecki: chcemy wykorzystać potencjał Bałtyku w handlu z Chinami, PAP, 23.11.2017; <https://www.pap.pl/aktualnosci/news%2C1179440%2Cmorawiecki-chcemy-wykorzystac-potencjal-baltyku-w-handlu-z-chinami.html>

²³ Jarosław Gowin na VII szczycie szefów rządów państw Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej i Chin w Sofii, Polish Prime Minister’s official website, 7.07.2018; <https://www.premier.gov.pl/mobile/wydarzenia/aktualnosci/jaroslaw-gowin-na-vii-szczycie-szefow-rzadow-panstw-europy-srodkowo.html>

²⁴ U.S. Relations With Poland, U.S. Department of State, 25.04.2018; <https://www.state.gov/r/pa/ci/bgn/2875.htm>

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Graph 1: NUMBER OF ARTICLES ON CHINA IN RELATION TO ECONOMICS OR POLITICS IN ALL ANALYZED POLISH MEDIA (BY TYPE OF MEDIA)



NUMBER OF ARTICLES ON CHINA IN RELATION TO ECONOMICS OR POLITICS IN ALL ANALYZED POLISH MEDIA

	YEAR OF PUBLICATION								Q1+2 2018	NUMBER OF ARTICLES
	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017		
NEWSPAPERS	26	64	63	33	32	86	113	93	26	536
WEEKLIES	5	4	9	4	7	13	8	19	5	74
NEWS SERVERS	93	210	199	131	120	252	224	217	33	1479
	124	278	271	168	159	351	345	329	64	2089

NUMBER OF ARTICLES PER YEAR

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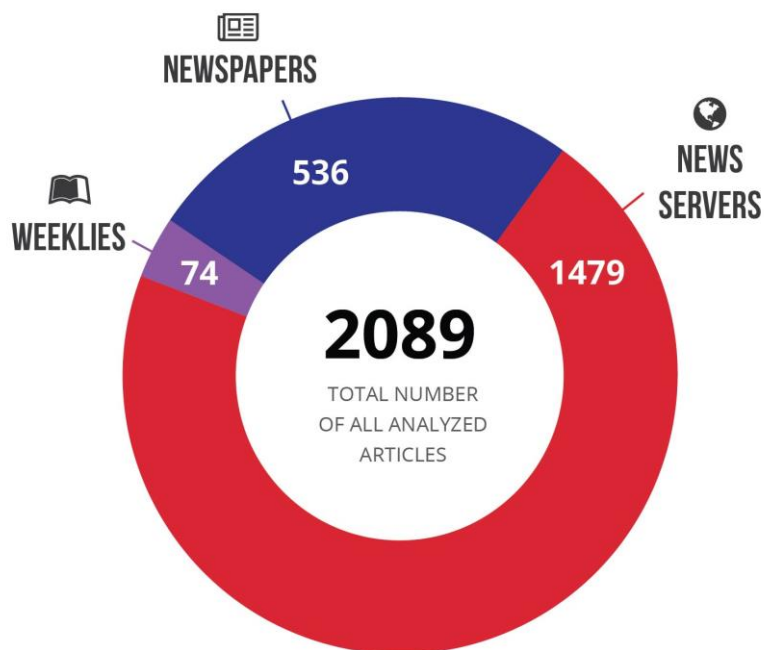
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Graph 2: NUMBER OF ARTICLES ON CHINA IN RELATION TO ECONOMICS OR POLITICS IN ALL ANALYZED POLISH MEDIA

**NUMBER OF ARTICLES ON CHINA
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IN ALL ANALYZED POLISH MEDIA**



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When it comes to the number of articles published each year, we observe that **intensification of Sino-Polish relations contributed to the increase in coverage of China-related topics**, with a special emphasis on highest-rank official state visits.

In 2011, when a Strategic Partnership agreement was signed in Beijing by Polish president Bronisław Komorowski and Chinese President Hu Jintao, nearly 300 articles were published on China in connection to economy or politics (out of which 170 were devoted either to the agreement, or to the visit – or both). In 2012, the year of the visit of Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao in Warsaw, where he announced the “16+1” initiative, a similar intensity of coverage, with as much as 104 texts referring to the sole visit, was found. The peak (351 outputs in total) occurred in 2015, when Polish President Andrzej Duda presided over an official delegation during CEE-China summit as the only head of the state among the remaining 16 prime ministers²⁵. In 2016, only slightly smaller number of articles on China appeared in the Polish press selected for the analysis. It was the year of Chinese President Xi Jinping’s visit to Warsaw, and the time when Poland joined China-proposed Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). A slight decline of the number of outputs continued in 2017, the year of Prime Minister Beata Szydło’s attendance at the One Belt One Road Forum for International Cooperation in Beijing. Going deeper into the analysis, it has to be noted that since 2015 the overwhelming majority of mentions was related to the One Belt One Road (OBOR or New Silk Road or Belt and Road) project, which was generally perceived in Poland as an opportunity to developmentally leap forward and boost Sino-Polish economic relations.²⁶ The first half of 2018 demonstrated quite a substantial diminution in numbers of articles (only 64 were published in total). Interestingly, Deputy Prime Minister Jarosław Gowin’s visit to the “16+1” summit in Sofia was not ranked among the top key subjects covered by Polish media at the time, proving the pattern that only highest-rank delegations enjoy maximum coverage.

²⁵ Prezydent leci do Chin. Program wizyty, PAP, 22.11.2015, <https://fakty.interia.pl/swiat/news-prezydent-leci-do-chin-program-wizyty.nId.1926106>

²⁶ Eksperci: nowy Jedwabny Szlak korzystny dla eksportu, firm i uczelni, Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs archive website https://wiedn.msz.gov.pl/p/msz_pl/aktualnosci/msz_w_mediach/eksperci_nowy_jedwabny_szlak_korzystny_dla_eksportu_firm_i_uczelni

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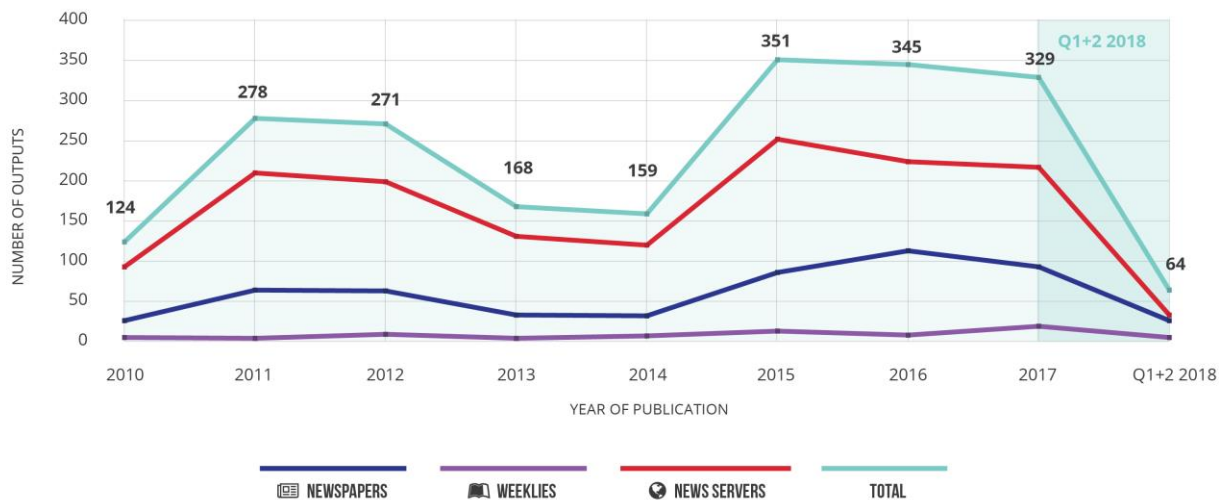
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Graph 3: QUANTITY OF ARTICLES ON CHINA IN RELATION TO POLITICS OR ECONOMICS PUBLISHED IN POLAND ACROSS THE PERIOD



QUANTITY OF ARTICLES ON CHINA IN RELATION TO POLITICS OR ECONOMICS PUBLISHED IN POLAND ACROSS THE PERIOD



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Unlike the Czech Republic, where media paid most attention to Chinese economic and political relations with other countries²⁷, Hungary – where the majority of articles focused on the general economic situation of China and its role in the world politics and economics²⁸, and Slovakia – where media very rarely covered the Slovak-China ties²⁹, **topics regarding Sino-Polish economic relations** (also in the framework of international formats, such as the Belt and Road Initiative, or 16+1 platform) **and China's economic and investment presence in Poland prevailed in the media coverage**. The analysis unveils the existence of very high expectations regarding the impact of China for Polish economy, downplaying other aspects of this cooperation. A visit of Jia Qinglin, Chairman of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, to Warsaw illustrates this tendency very well: the coverage focused mainly upon opportunities for lucrative contracts at a governmental, regional and business levels. The controversies the visit arose (accusation of crimes of genocide and torture of practitioners of Falun Gong in China) were mentioned by only few media outlets³⁰.

²⁷ <http://www.chinfluence.eu/media-analysis/>

²⁸ <http://www.chinfluence.eu/hungarian-media-analysis/>

²⁹ <http://www.chinfluence.eu/slovak-media-analysis/>

³⁰ Ewa Siedlecka, Faluin Dafa: Polska gości ludobójcę (Faluin Dafa: Poland is hosting a genocide killer), *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 3.11.2010; http://wyborcza.pl/1,75398,8608999,Faluin_Dafa_Polska_gosci_ludobojce.html

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Graph 4: REPRESENTATION OF TOPICS IN ARTICLES ON CHINA IN RELATION TO ECONOMICS OR POLITICS IN ALL ANALYZED POLISH MEDIA (2010-6/2018)



**REPRESENTATION OF TOPICS IN ARTICLES ON CHINA
IN RELATION TO ECONOMICS OR POLITICS IN ALL ANALYZED
POLISH MEDIA (2010-6/2018)**

ŁÓDŹ AND
CHENGDU

POLISH EXPORT TO CHINA
ROAD AND BELT

AIIB
HUMAN
RIGHTS

STATE VISITS TO CHINA

TRADE INBALANCE
16+1 CO-OPERATION WITH COVEC

STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

TRADE EXCHANGE

TRADE MISSIONS

CHINESE IMPORT TO POLAND
CENTRAL COMMUNICATION PORT
STATE VISITS TO POLAND

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Although **human rights** in China made it to the top 15 key words covered by the Polish media selected for this analysis, it is not the highest rating in a country which, according to Chinese experts, has had a reputation of being more eager than average to “lecture China on democratic standards”³¹. Indeed, an offer to share Polish experience with the Middle Kingdom (if it decides one day to “pluralize its political system”) was expressed in the annual exposé of then Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs Radosław Sikorski the very same year the Belt and Road initiative was launched.³² In turn, president Bronisław Komorowski – straight after his ground-breaking visit to China in 2011 – stated that it was “economic cooperation that should be the focus, as free market and property rights open the way to the rule of law”³³. By and large, also in the media coverage human rights were overshadowed by hopes for economic profits from Sino-Polish relations. Interestingly, the topic found its second popular position in the Polish discourse in the year 2013, mainly in the context of the first official visit of the speaker of the Sejm, Ewa Kopacz, to China on June 4, the 24th anniversary of the Tiananmen Square massacre. The date was considered misfortunate by some commentators, who even described it as an act of “selling dignity for contracts”.³⁴

What is worth noticing, **security-related issues were strongly underrepresented** in the media discourse within the examined timeframe. If the monitoring continued for another seven months, the analysis would certainly capture an increase in attention given to security in connection to China: in early 2019, a Chinese Huawei executive together with a former Polish counterintelligence officer were arrested on spying charges, which triggered an ongo-

³¹ Wojciech Lorenz, Prezydent rusza z misją do Chin (President is going for a mission to China), www.rp.pl, 14.12.2011; <https://www.rp.pl/artykul/769937-Prezydent-rusza-z-misja-do-Chin.html>

³² Radosław Sikorski, Ministry of Foreign Affairs' archive website, Exposé 2013; https://www.msz.gov.pl/pl/polityka_zagraniczna/priorytety_polityki_zagr_2017_2021/expose2/expose_2013/

³³ Zaskakujące słowa prezydenta (Surprising words of President), PAP, 24.12.2011; <https://wiadomosci.wp.pl/zaskakujace-slowa-prezydenta-nalezy-stawiac-na-6036809491113089a>

³⁴ Maria Kruczkowska, Godność za kontrakty. Czy Polacy powinni jechać do Chin 4 czerwca? (Dignity for Contracts. Should the Poles go to China on June 4?), Gazeta Wyborcza, 2013-05-31

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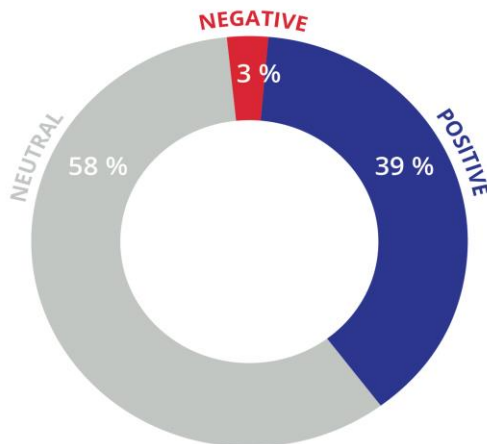
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ing public debate about security concerns resulting from Chinese presence in the region of Central Europe.

While the **dominating sentiment of the analyzed media outlets was neutral (58%)**, as much as **39 per cent of articles were evaluated as positive**, and only **3 per cent – as negative**.

Graph 5: IMAGE OF CHINA - ALL ANALYZED POLISH MEDIA

IMAGE OF CHINA - ALL ANALYZED POLISH MEDIA



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This is especially telling in comparison to media coverage of China in Hungary and Slovakia³⁵, where an overwhelming majority of articles on China were coded as neutral: 68 per cent and 85,8 per cent respectively. Moreover, in both countries the negative sentiments came second in a row (9,4% and 26% respectively) with only a small fraction of texts expressing favorable attitudes (4,8% and 6% respectively). The Czech media outputs, in turn, demonstrated the biggest polarity of sentiments as well as the highest amount of China-skeptic or downright critical stances (45% – neutral, 41% – negative, 14% – positive). Therefore, the image of China put forth by the **Polish mainstream media is radically different from the one found in the remaining Visegrad countries. The Polish media discourse is exceptionally positive on China** with only occasional negative mentions.

The **prevalence of topics evoking potential economic benefits of Poland's cooperation with China** – paradoxically, despite its actual modest outcome throughout the analyzed period, as well as to date – might justify the favorable trend observed in the analyzed articles. Poland has been declaring its interest in receiving Chinese investments in the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative so as to upgrade country's infrastructure and industries, as well as to attract additional funding to those sectors of economy, where there is no chance to cooperate with businesses from Western Europe or receive European Union funds (which will shrink significantly in the next budgetary framework anyway). There were hopes that the Chinese investment might to some extent supplement EU funds, especially in greenfield and brownfield projects.³⁶ Consequently, the number one topic of the Belt and Road, which scored the record number of 834 mentions, was evaluated as being presented mostly positively or neutrally, with very sporadic mentions about possible threats the project might bring about. A similar tendency to portray China-related issues in either predominantly positive or neutral way can be observed regarding other key subjects (such as Strategic Partnership,

³⁵ <http://www.chinfluence.eu/media-analysis/>

³⁶ Bruno Surdel, *Chińskie inwestycje w Polsce. Współpraca bez ekspansji na horyzoncie* (Chinese investments in Poland. No prospects for expansion), Centre For International Relations, Warsaw, 2018; <http://csm.org.pl/pl/opracowania-polacane/4053-chinskie-inwestycje-w-polsce-wspolpraca-bez-ekspansji-na-horyzoncie>

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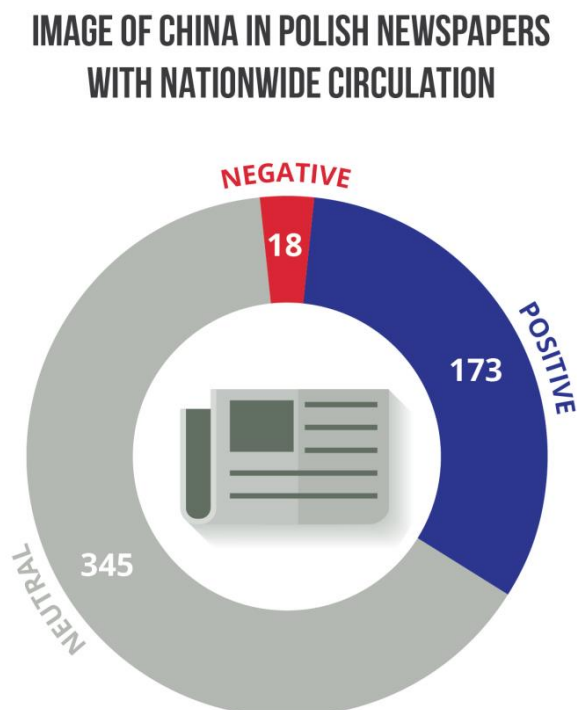
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Trade Missions, Poland's accession to AIIB or "16+1" initiative) identified through the Polish media mapping.

Graph 6: IMAGE OF CHINA IN POLISH NEWSPAPERS WITH NATIONWIDE CIRCULATION



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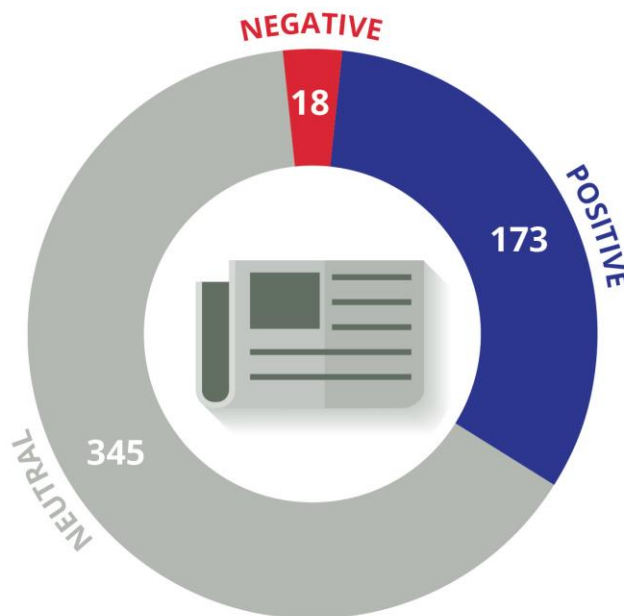
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Graph 7: IMAGE OF CHINA IN POLISH DAILIES

**IMAGE OF CHINA IN POLISH NEWSPAPERS
WITH NATIONWIDE CIRCULATION**



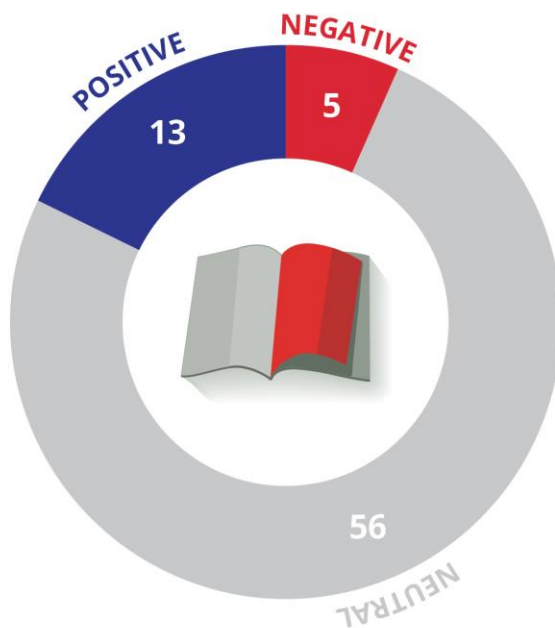
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IMAGE OF CHINA IN POLISH WEEKLIES



Graph 8: IMAGE OF CHINA IN POLISH WEEKLIES

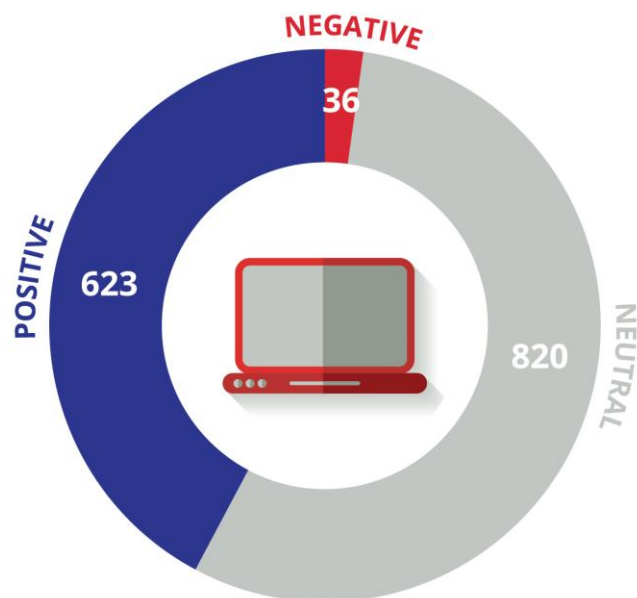
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IMAGE OF CHINA ON POLISH NEWS SERVERS



Graph 9: IMAGE OF CHINA ON POLISH NEWS SERVERS

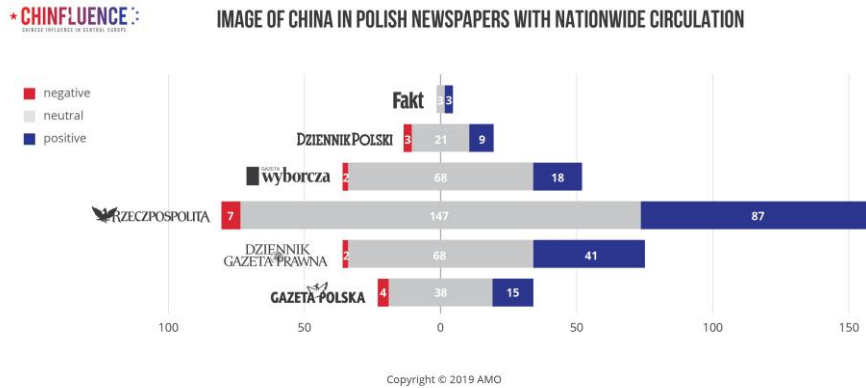
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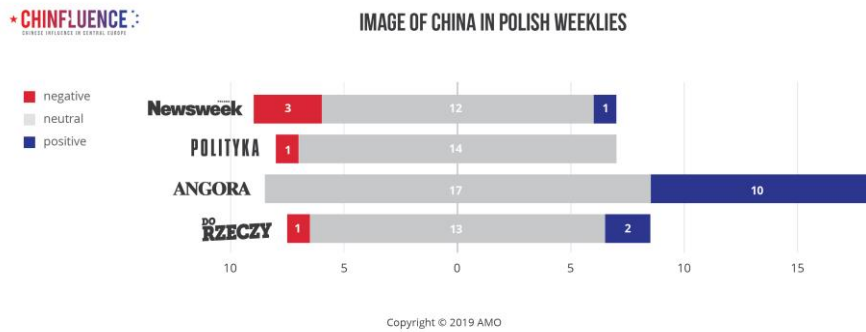
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Graph 10: IMAGE OF CHINA IN POLISH DAILIES (BY TITLES)



Graph 11: IMAGE OF CHINA IN POLISH WEEKLIES (BY TITLES)



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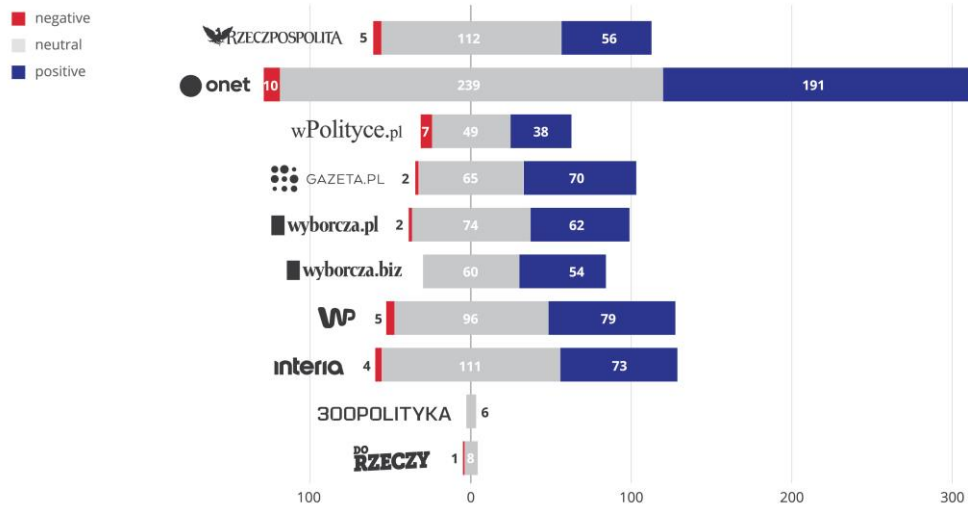
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Graph 12: IMAGE OF CHINA ON POLISH NEWS SERVERS (BY TITLES)



IMAGE OF CHINA ON POLISH NEWS SERVERS



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Who shapes the discourse on China in Poland?

The researchers looked at the main authors and co-authors of texts, as well as identified individuals and institutions who were mostly quoted by the media in vogue. Altogether 97 key agenda setters (that is: those persons who were cited³⁷ at least three times in the analyzed period – in case of journalists, authorship was counted as citation) were found and subjected to further study. For comparison, the Czech list was substantially longer (the total of 164 influencers), whereas Hungarian and Slovakian analyses revealed respectively 69 and 76 agenda setters.

Politicians (often of the highest-level ranking, such as those who sign Sino-Polish agreements) were found to be the most positive group of agenda setters – and the second biggest in numbers. Three quarters of Polish politicians who spoke on China issues for the Polish print and online servers demonstrated positive views on China-related subjects. Interestingly, in all other Visegrad countries the majority of politicians took predominantly neutral stance on China – in the Czech Republic and Slovakia over 50%; and over three quarters in Hungary. In addition, the Czech group was the most polarized – a bit less than a quarter of analyzed agenda setters expressed negative sentiment on China-related issues (but none in Hungary or Slovakia).

³⁷ It has to be emphasised that the quotations might at times have been taken out of context or represent only a fraction of the actual statement, thus, do not necessarily reflect the overall sentiment of a cited person towards China-related issues.

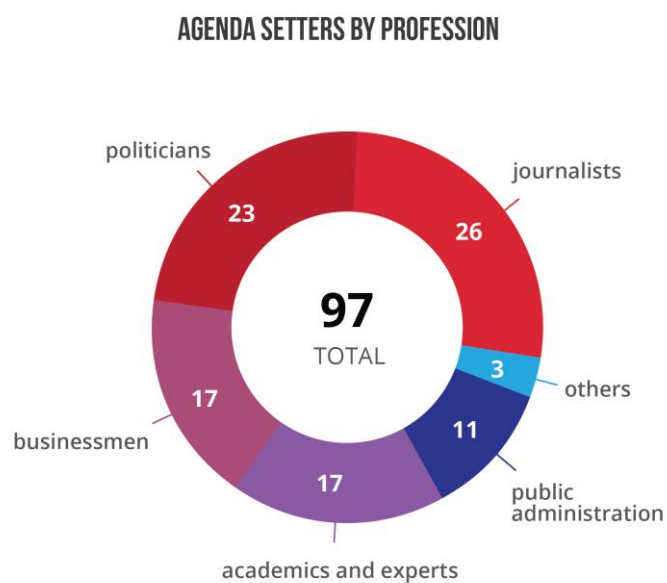
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Graph 13: AGENDA SETTERS BY PROFESSION



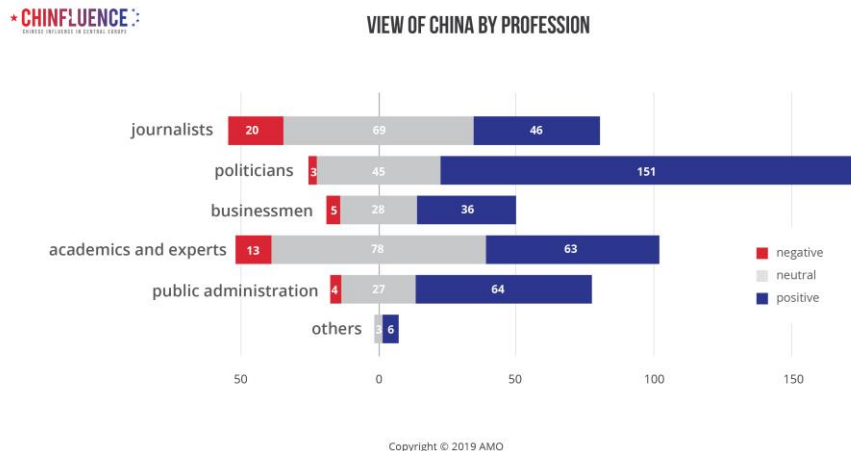
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Graph 14: VIEW OF CHINA BY PROFESSION



It is noteworthy that the only 3 negative mentions coded within the group of Polish politicians are attributed to Antoni Macierewicz, Minister of National Defense from 2015 to 2018, who at the very beginning of his term in the office in an interview with a Polish diaspora in Canada TV “Goniec TV Toronto” criticized the idea of the Belt and Road, claiming it was “a part of Western European, Russian and Chinese plot to eliminate American influence in the Euro-Asiatic region and to liquidate the sovereignty of Poland”³⁸. Although the incident hardly got through to the mainstream media, the Minister’s objections translated into action in early 2017, when he refused – to the huge dissatisfaction of the city of Łódź – to grant a permission to purchase a plot of land belonging to the Military Property Agency on which

³⁸ Interview with Antoni Macierewicz at https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=34&v=7gqX57MDcuY

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Beijing intended to build a communication center crucial for its global plans.³⁹ This is a symbolic demonstration of discrepancies that exist between political declarations and the lack of genuine intentions to co-operate with China, which – as some commentators believed – was invigorated by the US⁴⁰. The current developments with Washington advising its European partners, including Poland, to ban Huawei from their 5G networks⁴¹, seem to prove the point.

The second most positive group of Polish agenda setters were the representatives of public administration. Their sentiment towards China which could be found via the media mapping was from two thirds favorable, with hardly any negative mentions. However, it is worth observing that in the Czech Republic and Slovakia no negative opinions of state administration were coded (in Hungary this category was not created).

True to form, majority of Polish academics and experts, as well as journalists reported on China in a neutral way (which was also the case in all the other analyzed countries). In the same time, a substantial part of both groups demonstrated a positive sentiment with relatively small incidence of negative mentions. Still, the composition of their sentiments was the most polarized. The highest percentage of agenda setters leaning towards non-favorable views on China-related issues could be found between the representatives of media (15%). For comparison, around one third of Czech and Slovak journalists, as well as one fifth Hungarian ones took a negative stance on China. It is also worth noting that journalists outnumbered the other categories of agenda setters in all Visegrad countries. Thus, the public sentiment is mostly influenced by a handful of agenda setters, most of whom are journalists or politicians, and only to a lesser extend academics or China experts.

³⁹ Bogdan J. Góralczyk, Poland on the Route of the Chinese Silk Road: A Chance for Development or Just a Challenge?, In book: *New Structural Policy in an Open Market Economy*, pp.213-232, University of Warsaw Faculty of Management Press, Warsaw 2018; http://www.wz.uw.edu.pl/portaleFiles/6133-wydawnictwo-new_structural_2018/New_Structural_Policy_1.pdf

⁴⁰ Leszek Pietrzak, Bitwa o Polskę (A Battle for Poland), *Gazeta Finansowa*, 30.01.2017; <https://gf24.pl/wydarzenia/polityka/item/472-bitwa-o-polske>

⁴¹ Isobel Asher Hamilton, The Trump administration is warning allies to stay away from a powerful Chinese company — but not everyone's listening, 28.03.2019, <https://www.businessinsider.com/huawei-how-allies-are-reacting-to-us-calls-to-avoid-the-tech-firm-2019-2?IR=T>

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In case of Polish businessmen, over 50% of mentions were coded as positive, and slightly over 40% as neutral. As a rule, positive sentiments were expressed in relations to business opportunities with Chinese partners, initiatives (such as the Belt and Road or “16+1”) or investments that Poland was hoping to participate in and take advantage of. Majority of Czech entrepreneurs, in turn, proved to be neutral towards China-related issues (65%), with the exactly the same number of remaining negative and positive sentiments. Among Hungarian business representatives, no negative stance towards China was coded, and neutral attitudes radically prevailed. In Slovakia, only the category of business analysts was identified, whose neutral stances outnumbered negative opinions as much as two times.

Conclusions

Despite over a decade of political declarations, high-level meetings and visits, agreements signed, as well as new formats introduced, Sino-Polish relations have had little effect in boosting Polish growth. On the other hand, with China's growing importance as a number-two world economy, and its active presence in our region, it is necessary to consciously discuss – in the broadest possible circles – what the role of China for Poland in the changing global order is, to what extent and in which field we should co-operate, how to utilize the opportunities and minimize the challenges of this co-operation. Such a thoughtful debate was largely missing in the Polish public discourse in the analyzed period (until mid-2018). However, with the latter developments regarding US-China trade war, concerns about China's impact on national security, as well as growing sense of disillusionment with the fruits of bilateral cooperation, the debate on China in Poland has broadened recently. Had the study covered current media outputs, it could reveal far more realistic image of China in Polish media and among Polish elites.

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