

POLICY PAPER

Careful or careless? Debating Chinese investment and 5G technology in Central Europe

Ivana Karásková, Alicja Bachulska, Tamás Matura, Matej Šimalčík



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CAREFUL OR CARELESS? DEBATING CHINESE INVESTMENT AND 5G TECHNOLOGY IN CENTRAL EUROPE

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Data analysis – To access all data on Chinese activities in Central Europe, visit us at www.mapinfluence.eu.

The publication was prepared within the project **MapInfluenCE** (previously known as ChinfluenCE), that focuses on both China and Russia's influence in Central Europe, specifically within the Visegrád nations of the Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary and Slovakia. The comparative nature of the project enables identification of the strategies and tactics employed by China and Russia and discern the convergences and divergences in their respective approaches. The project is designed and run by the Association for International Affairs (AMO), a Prague-based foreign policy think tank and NGO. The preparation of this paper was supported by a grant from the National Endowment for Democracy (NED).

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Summary

- Over the past three years, media coverage of China in the Visegrád countries (V4) has undergone significant changes. This policy paper maps the development of two specific cases, focusing on media discourse of Chinese investment to the region and China's involvement in 5G networks buildup. The findings are compared to a previously conducted analysis,¹ enabling further conclusions to be drawn on the overall evolution of the discourse with regard to China's role in the V4 countries since 2010.
- The Czech media discourse on China's investment and 5G involvement from 2017 to 2020 was surprisingly flat, featuring mostly neutral sentiment. During this period, journalists and politicians dominated the debate. The 5G narrative, however, was also influenced by the Czech security community. Critically assessed, the neutrality exhibited is not the product of a vibrant debate with careful consideration of arguments and, as such, can easily be swayed in either extreme direction.
- The debate on Chinese investment has mostly focused on the lack of adequate investment or the failure of CEFC company in the Czech Republic, rather than differentiating between welcome investment in certain sectors as opposed to areas where it would pose a security risk.
- The analysis revealed that the Czech 5G debate in media, though internationalized at the level of themes and frameworks, is primarily influenced by domestic concerns. The media had a tendency to convey the issue as mostly technical, giving the impression that the topic should be left for the politicians and experts to decide upon. The debate was strongly impacted by the warning of the Czech National Cyber and Information Security Agency (NÚKIB) over the use of Chinese products in 5G networks. NÚKIB's warning was downplayed on many occasions by the Czech President Miloš Zeman. As a result, the Czech 5G debate is intertwined with NÚKIB's ability to withstand political pressures and retain its credibility.
- Chinese actors, such as the Huawei company, continue influencing the Czech media discourse. The analysis found out that advertorials sponsored by Huawei were regularly placed in Denik.cz since October 2020. Equally interesting is the narrative conveyed to the audience by TV Barrandov, co-owned by the Chinese state-owned investment firm CITIC. The sentiment of its media production was decidedly positive towards China, while taking a critical stance towards the US.

- The Polish media narrative on Chinese investment and China's involvement in 5G networks was largely neutral in tone. In comparison to the previous period, the current weakening of ties between Warsaw and Beijing seems to result in less enthusiastic coverage of China's investment and general decline in the interest in the topic.
- Polish media focus has shifted towards strategic and security implications of Chinese economic presence and ties with the outside world, which are largely seen by the media through the prism of Sino-American strategic competition. Regarding the 5G issue, security aspects and the role of the US thus came to the forefront, despite efforts by Huawei representatives and Chinese diplomats to soften the image of the company.
- The Polish China-related media discourse is predominantly led by journalists and politicians, not experts or academics. A large portion of it originates in foreign outlets, primarily Western European and American, or is based on content copied directly from Polish and international press agencies. Short news generally prevail over longer analytical pieces, with close to no examples of investigative journalism on the topic.
- Most of the coverage assumed a simplistic perspective in which the US was pressuring Poland to make decisions in line with Washington's interests, with very little room left for Warsaw's own agency. At the same time, many outlets offered space to highly politicized voices (e.g. Chinese diplomats or American politicians) without critically debating and contrasting their arguments, thus risking being perceived as media legitimizing these political positions.
- Despite its growing influence, China-related subjects remain at the margins of the media discourse in Poland, with seemingly limited interest among local authors in contributing to the domestic as well as international debate on China's rise.
- In Slovakia, media coverage of China reflects the changes in Slovak approach to China and overall sobering up from Chinese promises. This has translated to a decreasing interest in the topic of Chinese investment, as well as the increasingly negative sentiment with which the media reported on it.
- Nevertheless, a complex public debate on China in Slovakia has yet to emerge. A significant portion of media coverage is formed by re-prints of reports prepared by press agencies.
- Slovak discourse is formed chiefly by foreign actors, especially politicians from the US, China, and the Czech Republic. Slovak politicians do not feature prominently and, as a result, the Slovak national debate on the topic has been very timid.

- In Hungary, media outlets close to the government remain more positive about China than opposition and independent media. However, pro-government media seldom praise China itself. They comment on the successes of Hungarian foreign policy in forging closer relations with China and emphasize the importance of bilateral economic and political relations. The ties with China are thus portrayed as good for Hungary.
- As our other research has shown, the elite of the governing party nurtures a realistic view of China. Cognitive tension between the pro-China narrative of the government and the deeply rooted personal suspicions of journalists could easily lead to the scenario where bilateral relations are depicted positively while China itself is perceived negatively.
- Hungarian media coverage on issues related to Chinese investment is mostly driven by diplomatic occasions and by the pro-government media which proactively inflates the number of articles that cover the international activities of Hungarian government officials. Extensive coverage of real estate investment is a unique feature of the Hungarian discourse, in comparison to discourse found in other three V4 countries. The 5G issue was dominated by journalists, relying on foreign sources such as Western news agencies.
- The Hungarian discourse on China focuses mostly on materialistic considerations, while values or political issues are less relevant to the local media. Given that the wider public seemingly do not care or is not informed enough about what is at stake, this approach is unlikely to change in the near future, unless the general election of 2022 brings fundamental changes to the political life of the country.

Key recommendations

- Visegrád countries should differentiate between the types of Chinese investment. It may increase both the credibility of the Visegrád countries for foreign investors as well as lead towards more mature and transparent debate over national economic interests.
- In the Visegrád countries, investigative journalism should be supported and encouraged as the need for an informed and facts-based public debate on China is consistently growing.
- Politicians ought to avoid unnecessary politicization and populist framing of the China-focused discourse. The formation of an effective foreign, security, and economic policy on China requires a fact-based discourse motivated by clearly formulated national interests.
- A lack of local elites with specific knowledge on China and related issues is a persisting problem, especially in Slovakia. Governments should promote the development of a domestic China-watching community to form a more robust foundation of public understanding for the national discussion on countries' interests vis-à-vis China.
- As the importance of both Chinese investment and participation of Chinese companies in 5G networks is on the rise in Washington and Brussels, the region should be ready for heated debates with uneasy conclusions. In this context, all V4 countries would benefit from regular disclosure of official information about Chinese investment and, generally, as much transparency on the matter as possible.

Introduction and methodology

Ivana Karásková

Association for International Affairs (AMO)

In 2018, MapInfluenCE published a paper entitled *Central Europe for Sale: The Politics of China's Influence*,² which presented findings of unique large-scale research of media reporting and political agency related to China in the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia from 2010 till mid-2017. It provided a novel insight into the formation of Chinese influence in the three countries, relying on an analysis based on a dataset of more than 7,700 media outputs and a series of interviews with agenda setters and insiders. The analysis asked crucial questions of how the discourse on China in Central Europe is formed, who sets the agenda and what topics were prevalent in countries' media debates connected to China. The analysis covered dailies, weeklies with political or economic focus, radio and TV stations and news servers. It looked at mainstream as well as alternative media, both public and privately owned, including media (co)owned by Chinese companies.

The complex paper represented a first attempt to use media discourse analysis to research coverage of China in Central Europe. A year later, the team added analysis of media reporting on China in Poland, covering an even longer period (2010 - June 2018) and enabling comparison among all Visegrád countries (V4).³

Crucially, the work of MapInfluenCE revealed in the case of the Czech Republic that Chinese ownership of local media outlets effectively eliminates all negative views of the People's Republic of China (PRC), its politics and policies. These findings contributed to a necessary mental shift in the perception of media by key European stakeholders and led to the inclusion of media into EU investment screening mechanisms which became fully operational in October 2020.⁴ The instrument created a cooperation and information-sharing mechanism regarding investment to sensitive sectors from non-European investors. Subsequently, media has also been included in national screening legislations (e.g. in the Czech Republic) which have enabled governments to block unwanted investment into strategic sectors. One of the recommendations of the 2018 MapInfluenCE paper thus shaped policymaking on both the EU and national level contributing to better protection of media.

Second, the paper identified and explained the links among agenda setters involved in the China discourse in Visegrád countries. It found out that it was mostly journalists and politicians who formed the discourse. It also noticed that the level of understanding of China was, in a number of instances, quite rudimentary. Therefore, the paper called for an increase of China expertise in Central European countries. "What is needed," the authors argued, "is not just more intense participation of China experts in the public debate, but also continuous education of journalists, policymakers and politicians. The goal is to promote critical discussion of China based on facts, rather than prejudices or wishful thinking. Support for investigative journalism

with a long-term focus on China-related topics is an essential component of this priority.⁵ Moreover, the authors argued that the Central European public was relegated to information mostly imported from foreign news agencies or English-speaking media sources.

Finally, the paper noticed a staggering difference in tone and focus of media across the V4 countries. While Polish, Hungarian and Slovak media predominantly focused on trade, investment (or a lack of thereof) and bilateral economic relations, featuring mostly neutral sentiment of the discourse, Czech media focused with more frequency on criticism of human rights abuses in China, followed by mentions of censorship, communism and Tibet.

Three years later, it is safe to claim that – while the lack of sufficient national funding devoted to home-grown China expertise still persists in academia and think tanks – independent local journalism focusing on China has evolved. It has helped shed light on China's cooperation with academia,⁶ non-transparent dealings of local politicians with China,⁷ Chinese propaganda and disinformation tactics in influencing media⁸ or activities of Chinese company Huawei⁹. The level of awareness about problems associated with (some) China's activities in Central Europe has arguably increased among the local politicians, decision makers, think tankers, journalists and general public.

As mentioned above, over the past three years, the media coverage of China in Visegrád countries underwent many changes. In order to comprehend this development fully and in a complex manner, the researchers decided to expand the discourse analysis to the following period. However, as China continues to be a focal point for decision makers the world over, its media coverage has increased accordingly. Applying the very same methodology that enabled an extensive mapping of China coverage in 2018 has thus no longer been feasible due to the sheer volume of published outputs. Therefore, the researchers decided to focus only on two key issues – Chinese investment in V4 countries and Chinese involvement in 5G networks build up. These two issues had clear regional dimensions and an evolution of the discussion of the topic could be documented throughout the period. Not only the topics represent crucial aspects of China's influence in the region – economic and technological – but they also form connotations which surpass the national and regional context of the debates and strongly connect it to broader international developments, including relations with crucial political and security partners of Central European states (e.g. the United States of America or Germany).

The researchers again asked key questions on how the discourse on an economic issue (Chinese investment) and a security issue (China's involvement in 5G networks) has evolved since the previous analysis until the end of 2020. Which factors influenced the discourse? Has the discourse been driven by domestic affairs or by activities of other international players (such as China, European Union or the US)? Who were the key agenda setters and how they perceived these two issues? Has the discourse changed since the previous analysis which covered the period from 2010? Further, what can be said overall about the decade of reporting on China by Central European media?

The resulting analysis includes reporting by the most followed national media from July 2017 (July 2018 in case of Poland) till the end of 2020. Altogether, 55 Czech,

Polish, Hungarian and Slovak media outlets (dailies, TV and radio stations and online news portals) were selected for the analysis, resulting in a dataset of 1,744 texts on Chinese investment and 1,769 texts on Chinese involvement in 5G networks buildup in four different languages.

The dataset was then coded according to a number of criteria: type of the text (e.g. news, article, commentary, interview, etc.), sub-themes (topics discussed in relation to the main theme, arranged as keywords) and agenda setters (authors and co-authors of texts and quoted individuals or representatives of institutions). The second-level agenda setting research of China coverage in connection to 5G and investment issues in V4 media focused on affective attributes found in the texts. Affective attributes represent an overall tone of the media coverage, a sentiment attached which influences the reading of the text and is used by journalists to frame an event. Coding of the sentiment was done on a three-points Likert-type scale – the sentiment could be either neutral, negative or positive. The coders measured the sentiment (neutral, negative or positive attitudes vis-à-vis China) of the opinions presented in the set of key themes, including possible variations between different media outlets. Each text received only one sentiment value.

The following chapters detail specific approaches toward these issues in each country, analyze the outcomes and provide country-specific conclusions and recommendations.

Czechia: Keeping the distance

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While the question of Chinese investment in the Czech Republic (or a lack of thereof) has been a constant component of the media discourse on China during the previous period mapped by MapInfluenCE, the topic of 5G networks buildup and possible involvement of Chinese companies have been a very new addition to the debate. Both issues are, however, interlinked in the Czech Republic's public discourse. In 2015, the Chinese company China Energy Company Limited (CEFC) announced its interest to found its headquarters in Prague. During its shopping spree, it acquired stakes in a number of companies, including a media company Empresa Media which owned (until April 2020) TV Barrandov. Moreover, CEFC chairman Ye Jianming was appointed President Miloš Zeman's advisor.¹⁰ Yet in 2017, the CEFC company, which was portrayed as a vanguard of future Chinese investment to the Czech Republic, was rumored to be near bankruptcy and subsequently had to be bailed out by the Chinese state-owned CITIC group.¹¹ Ye Jianming disappeared in China and has been questioned by Chinese authorities in connection to a Ponzi scheme the company was allegedly built on¹² and cases of corruption.

The fiasco with CEFC was followed by another blow as at the end of 2018 the Czech National Cyber and Information Security Agency (NÚKIB) issued a warning regarding the use of ZTE and Huawei products in Czech critical infrastructure, including 5G networks. This move made Czechia an early skeptical voice in the European debate over 5G security. The security concerns of the Czech agency echoed the suspicion on Chinese state intentions in the United States and several European countries. Zeman commented critically on the move of NÚKIB, downplaying the security concerns and claiming that the warning is a part of US-China economic competition.¹³ An experience with CEFC and NÚKIB warning over the use of Chinese companies' products in critical infrastructure came in short succession and resulted in spikes in media coverage of both issues.

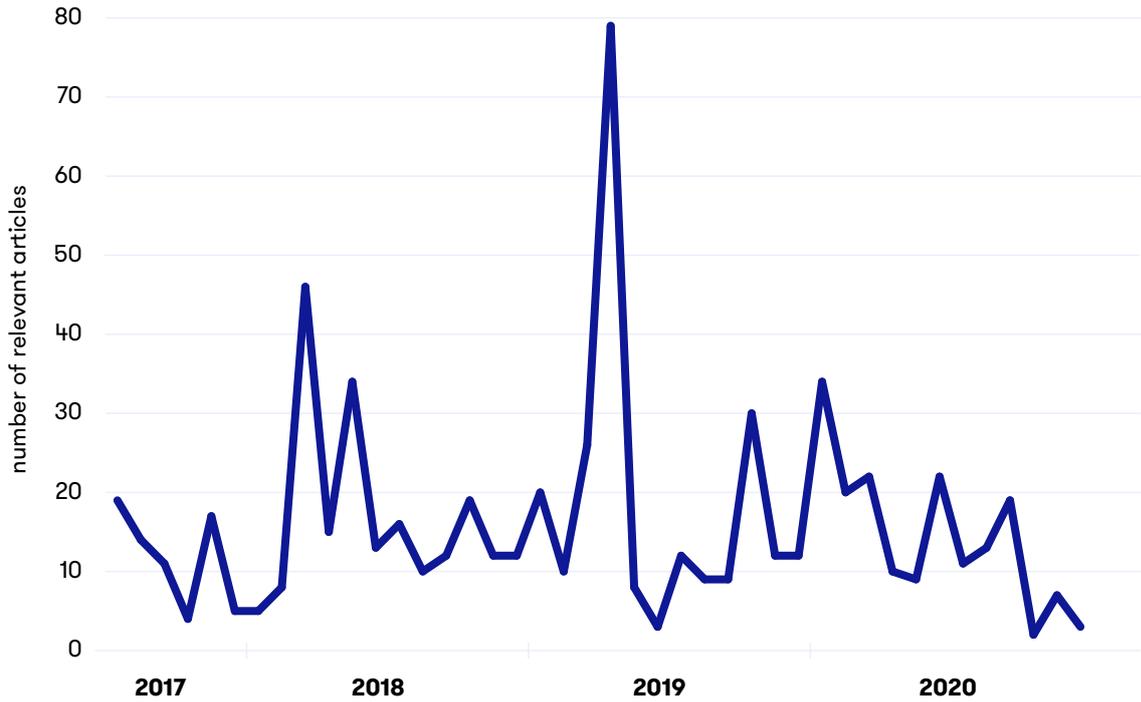
Based on the popularity of a given media among the Czech audience, altogether 15 media outlets were selected for the analysis: three dailies with a nation-wide reach (Blesk, a tabloid, MF Dnes, a daily owned by a company with direct links to the Prime Minister Andrej Babiš, and Hospodářské noviny), three TV stations (the public service broadcaster ČT 1 and privately-owned TV Nova and TV Prima), three radio stations (most-listened to station of the public service radio broadcaster Radiožurnál, privately-owned Radio Impuls and Evropa 2) and five news portals (novinky.cz, idnes.cz, aktualne.cz, denik.cz and seznam.cz). As the previous research conducted by MapInfluenCE¹⁴ discovered a positive change in China-related coverage by media outlets invested into by the Chinese company CEFC, we also added TV Barrandov to the dataset to check for any distortions. The media database Newton was used for

filtering texts concerning 5G issues and investment in connection to China, resulting in a dataset composed of 787 texts on the former issue and 674 on the latter.

CEFC AS A BOGEYMAN OF CHINESE INVESTMENT

The data on media coverage of Chinese investment indicate that it has been mostly domestic affairs (i.e. the CEFC scandal) which influenced the local media production. Three major events contributed to the increased media coverage: first, in spring 2018, two spikes occurred in connection to the investigation of CEFC in China, debts of CEFC in the Czech Republic, and an interesting ‘rescue mission’ led to China by President Zeman’s emissaries – the Chancellor of the Czech President Vratislav Mynář, together with Zeman’s advisor Martin Nejedlý and ex-Minister of Defense, lobbyist and vice-chairman of the board of directors of CEFC Jaroslav Tvrdík. While the visit of China was officially presented as an inquiry over the faith of the president’s advisor Ye Jianming,¹⁵ the media were skeptical and presented a different picture according to which the emissaries inquired about the future of CEFC assets in the Czech Republic. The interest in CEFC’s future was later confirmed by the official statement of the Czech President.¹⁶ Second, and by far the most covered event, was President Zeman’s fifth trip to China to which he was accompanied by political and business delegations in April 2019. The last most covered event was connected again to Zeman and his refusal to attend the 17+1 summit in a protest over the lack of Chinese investment to the country in January 2020. With the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the issue of Chinese investment lost appeal and substance as the

GRAPH 1: EVOLUTION OF COVERAGE OF CHINESE INVESTMENT IN ANALYZED CZECH MEDIA OUTLETS (7/2017-2020)

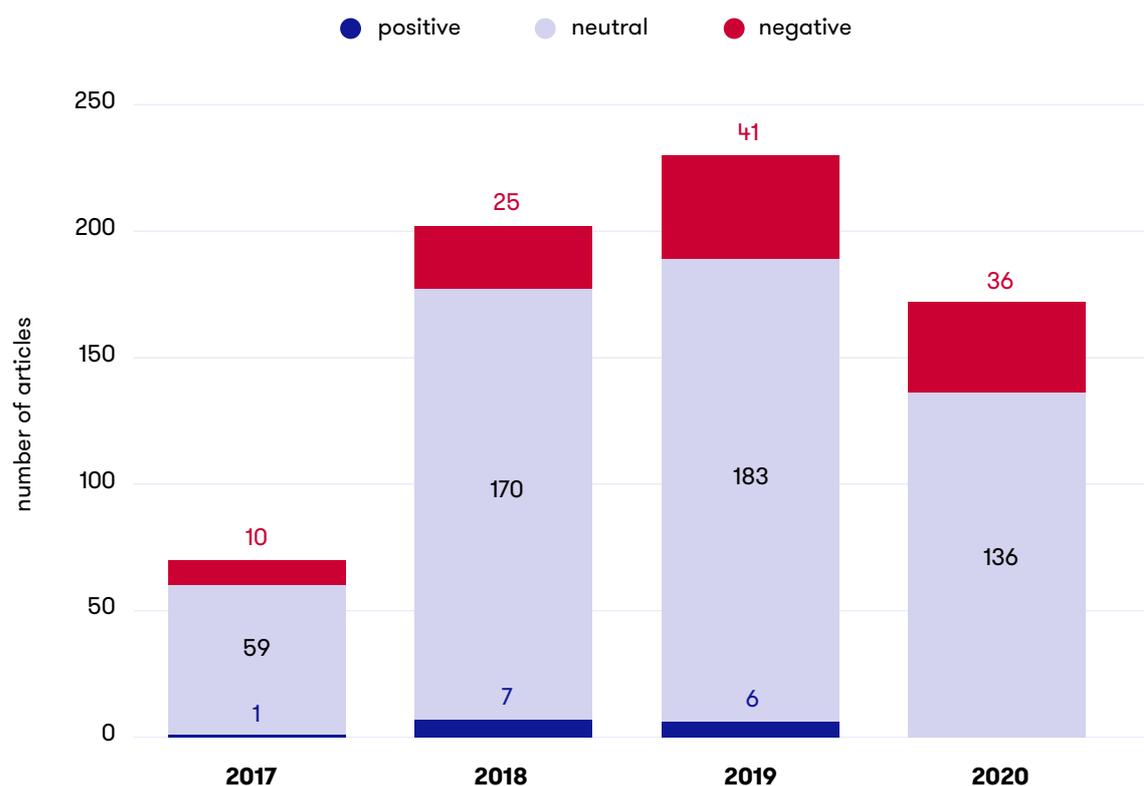


media diverted their attention towards other China-related issues. Additional events which attracted some media attention were also connected to domestic developments, such as potential economic impacts of severing sister-cities ties between Prague and Beijing (October 2019) or the Czech Senate President's Miloš Vystrčil trip to Taiwan which sparked another diplomatic row with Beijing (announced in June and taken place in August and September 2020).

News articles clearly dominated the discourse (429 texts), followed by interviews (75), commentaries (64), articles (38), reportages (34), blogs (20) and debates (14). Among analyzed dailies, the most active media in covering Chinese investment issue were *Hospodářské noviny* (127 articles), with *MF Dnes* covering the issue with 62 articles and the tabloid *Blesk* barely mentioning the topic (21 articles). In both TV and radio stations, it was public service media which paid higher attention to Chinese investment in the Czech Republic – ČT1 produced 53 media outputs, while *Radiožurnál* 47 (TV NOVA, TV Prima and TV Barrandov covered the issue with 5, 14 and 19 outputs, respectively). Privately-owned radio stations (*Rádio Impuls* and Europe 2) did not pay attention to the topic (as documented by 2 and 0 outputs, respectively). Amongst the news portals, *seznam.cz* and *novinky.cz* led in the coverage of Chinese investment with 100 and 80 media outputs, followed by *aktualne.cz* (66), *denik.cz* (44) and *idnes.cz* (34).

An overwhelming majority of texts (81 percent) was neutral, simply describing the amounts of investment, bilateral trade volume or positions and actions of the engaged politicians and lobbyists. 17 percent of the texts, however, were fairly critical, mostly

GRAPH 2: SENTIMENT OF TEXTS ON CHINESE INVESTMENT IN ANALYZED CZECH MEDIA OUTLETS (7/2017–2020) – OVERALL DATA



appearing in the commentary sections or in the blogs and mentioning China's activities abroad. Only 2 percent of texts were coded as carrying a positive sentiment.

As mentioned above, most media remained cautious regarding the benefits and scale of Chinese investment in the Czech Republic. Interestingly, the majority of the media was skeptical even before the breakout of the CEFC scandal. Media have continued in a trend described in the previous *MapInfluenCE* policy paper¹⁷ where they resisted the push of the portion of the ruling political elite and certain businesses to promote a more positive image of China. The most varied approach can be observed in the case of TV Barrandov, which underwent a change from reporting on Chinese investment in an overwhelmingly positive manner, especially through regular interviews granted by the Czech President Miloš Zeman, until September 2018. Since November 2018, the president has been either vocally negative or neutral on the issue of Chinese investment in TV Barrandov.

While Jaromír Soukup, the interviewer and also the co-owner of the TV station, had presented neither a positive nor a negative position on China in news reporting, he seems to run a different strategy for the interviews with the Czech president. Soukup was often negative on China in his questions towards the president, possibly to stir the discussion or to enable the president to challenge the position and present a positive view of China. The interest of the president to the Belt and Road Initiative (and its routing through the Czech Republic) was mentioned repeatedly.¹⁸ The Chinese investment, according to Zeman, has not ceased, only slowed down. He blamed media for writing CEFC off and pointed to “much stronger” CITIC which overtook the assets.¹⁹ At the same time, he also warned against possible impact of Czech actions on the Czech companies in China, such as Home Credit and Skoda Auto. The investment into Prague-based Slavia soccer club was cited as an example of a successful Chinese investment in the Czech Republic.

In general, it can be argued that the Czech media included in the analysis did not attempt to bring new information or conduct thorough investigation of the Chinese investment issue. The question asked was not about where the Czech Republic intends to attract Chinese investment, whether there are areas where the investment does not pose any security risk and may benefit the country, but whether the current investment numbers are perceived as sufficient, according to a specific quoted politician. Most of the attention has been paid to the actions of local political actors or lobbyists and impacts of their activities, such as President Zeman's trips to China, Prague Mayor's Zdeněk Hřib announcements in connection to sister-city agreement or Czech Senate President Miloš Vystrčil's trip to Taiwan. Both issues revolving around Hřib and Vystrčil were presented as having a potential impact on Chinese investment to the country and led to brief comparisons of the volume of Taiwanese and Chinese investment. Attempts to cover CEFC global operations, the persona of Ye Jianming or detailed analysis of Chinese investment (beyond mere list of companies invested into by CEFC/CITIC) were lacking. Some of the media outlets (e.g. *idnes.cz*, *MF Dnes*) mentioned security risks connected to Chinese investment, such as a dependency on China. Especially after 2019, the Czech media debate on Chinese investment was relatively flat.

The following word cloud illustrates the distribution of the topics in the Czech media discourse on Chinese investment. More than half of the analyzed texts focused

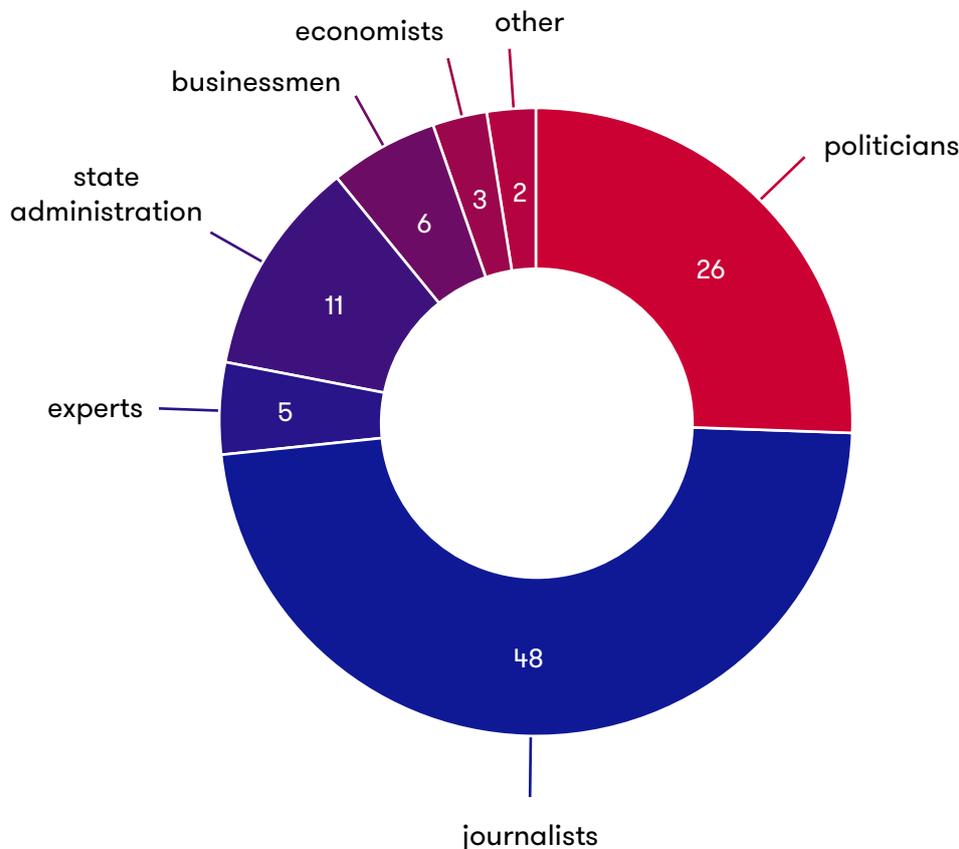
IMAGE 1: REPRESENTATION OF KEY TOPICS CONNECTED TO CHINESE INVESTMENT IN ANALYZED CZECH MEDIA OUTLETS (7/2017–2020)



on Chinese investment in the Czech Republic, while about one seventh discussed the experience with Chinese investment abroad. Other prevalent topics included risks of Chinese investment (espionage, acquisition of strategic technologies and know-how), Zeman’s trips to China, investigation of Ye Jianming, investment from CEFC/CITIC (including investment to Slavia soccer club) or Hřib and Vystrčil’s positions on China.

Unsurprisingly, the list of agenda setters is relatively long, comprising 439 authors, co-authors or quoted persons. However, those who have spoken within the discourse at least five times and were in a position of significantly influencing the debate, were only 43. As authors and co-authors of the texts, journalists logically create the biggest category of agenda setters (48 percent) with Jaromír Soukup (TV Barrandov), Luděk Mádl (seznam.cz), Tomáš Pavlíček (Radiožurnál), Ondřej Houska (ihned.cz) or Barbora Šámalová (ČT1) and Martin Ehl (Hospodářské noviny) most prominently featured in the discourse on the issue. Politicians represented another category (26 percent) with President Zeman and Prime Minister Andrej Babiš occupying the top positions, followed by Tomáš Petříček, former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Zdeněk Hřib, Mayor of Prague, or Miloš Vystrčil, President of the Senate. State administration staff (11 percent) filled third position with Vratislav Mynář, Chancellor of the President, and Jiří Ověčáček, spokesperson of the Office of the President, featured most prom-

GRAPH 3: PERCENTAGE OF AGENDA SETTERS (BY OCCUPATION) IN TEXTS ON CHINESE INVESTMENT IN ANALYZED CZECH MEDIA OUTLETS (7/2017–2020)



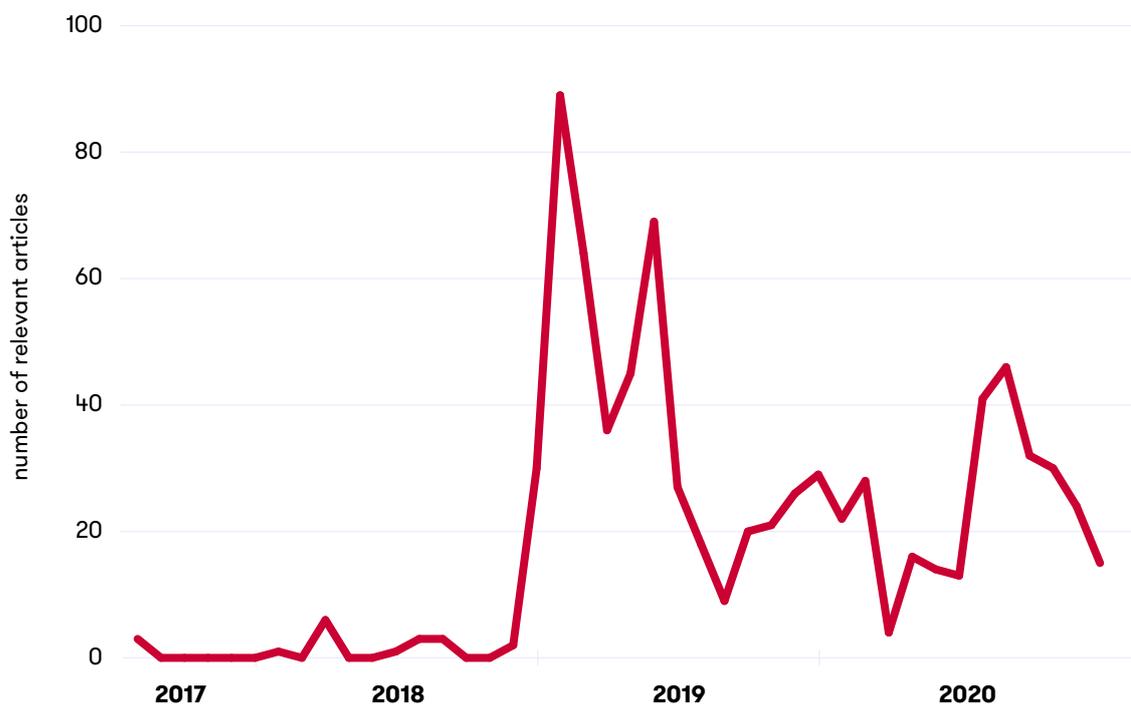
inently. Finally, representatives of business and business analysts (8 percent) and China experts (5 percent) also influenced the discourse.

ENTER HUAWEI? FAILURE TO CONNECT

The warning of NÚKIB on Huawei and ZTE products in December 2018 prompted the Czech state’s reaction, leading to the evaluation of the products of both Chinese companies in the networks of Czech state institutions covered by the cybersecurity law and the exclusion of Huawei from the tender on building a tax portal and the tender on body scanners at the Prague’s Václav Havel airport. It also led to an undiplomatic and assertive reaction from the Chinese Embassy in Prague and a subsequent diplomatic rift, in which the Chinese Ambassador interpreted NÚKIB’s warning as a “mistake” and the Czech prime minister Andrej Babiš publicly called him a liar.^{20,21} In reaction to the security warning Huawei threatened legal action. The evolution of the issue, of course, resonated within the Czech media discourse.

Chinese potential involvement in the buildup of 5G networks and risks associated with it were covered by the Czech media slightly more in comparison to Chinese investment – our dataset included 787 texts. Yet in comparison to the investment issue, the 5G debate in the Czech media was more internationalized. While the main

GRAPH 4: EVOLUTION OF COVERAGE OF 5G ISSUE IN CONNECTION TO CHINA IN ANALYZED CZECH MEDIA OUTLETS (7/2017–2020)

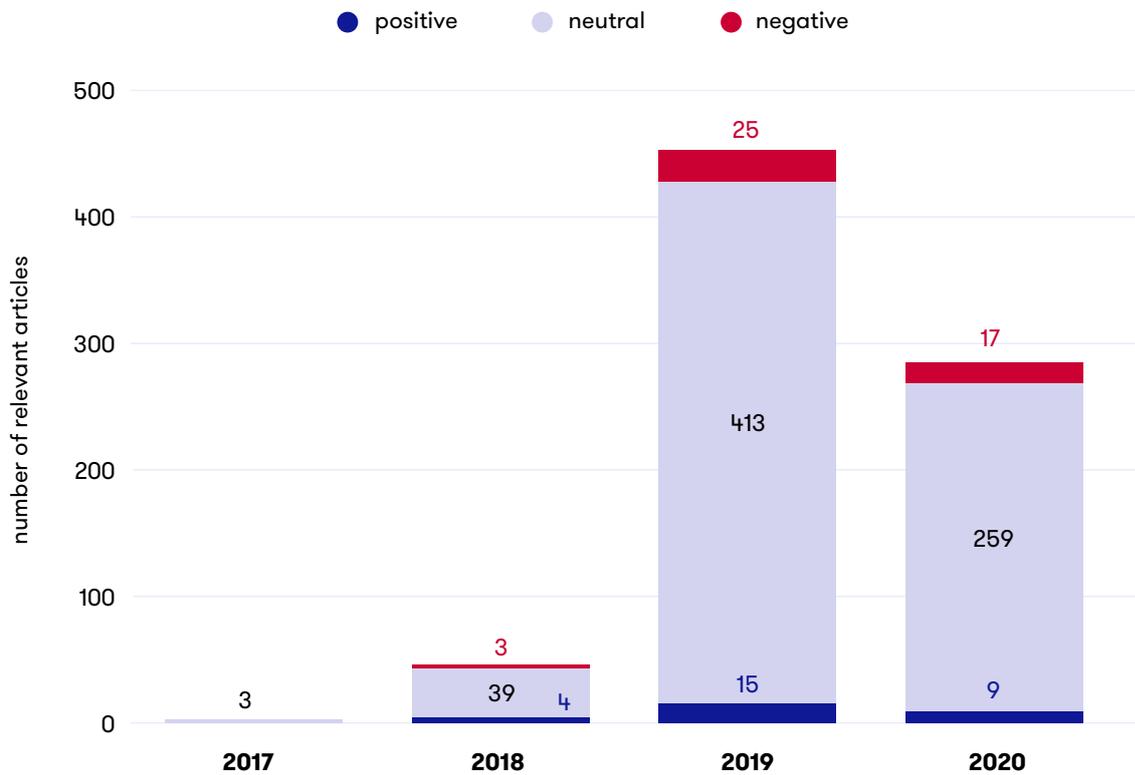


and strongest impetus for the debate came from an action of a domestic actor (the warning of NÚKIB), further push was connected to activities of external players. The outbreak of Sino-American trade war, the UK change of a position on Huawei, European Commission's release of the recommendations on 5G (EU 5G Toolbox), and the former US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's visit to Prague in August 2020 represent such moments. Aktuálně investigated the case of an "independent analysis" claiming that the exclusion of Huawei from 5G networks will cost the Czech Republic an additional 38 billion CZK.²² The analysis was later on found out to be sponsored by the Huawei company. Other articles which appeared in Aktuálně focused on Zhenhua Data Technology, as an example of a company that engages in surveillance in China but also monitors diplomats, politicians or "politically exposed persons."²³

Most of the texts focusing on the 5G issue were news (591), followed by interviews (70), commentaries (48), articles (34), reportages (26) and debates (9). A new feature, however, occurred when the local media ran a series of 5 advertorials, all of them paid for by Huawei.

Among analyzed dailies the most active media in covering the 5G issues were, again, Hospodářské noviny (135 articles), followed by MF Dnes (28 articles) and the tabloid Blesk mostly ignoring the issue (7 articles). Similarly to the previously described issue, in both TV and radio stations, the public service broadcasters paid higher attention to the topic than privately-owned media. ČT1 produced 40 media outputs, while Radiožurnál 50 (TV NOVA, TV Prima and TV Barrandov covered the issue with 7, 10 and 9 outputs, respectively). Privately-owned radio stations (Rádio Impuls and Europe 2) did not pay attention to the topic (as documented by 4 and 0 outputs, respectively). Amongst the news portals, novinky.cz led in coverage with

GRAPH 5: SENTIMENT OF TEXTS ON 5G ISSUE IN CONNECTION TO CHINA IN ANALYZED CZECH MEDIA OUTLETS (7/2017–2020) – OVERALL DATA



218 media outputs, followed by *aktualne.cz* (96) and *seznam.cz* (92). *Denik.cz* and *idnes.cz* contributed to the debate on the 5G issue in connection to China by 65 and 26 media outputs, respectively.

When compared to the previous issue of Chinese investment, 5G-related debate was even more technical, resulting in mostly neutral sentiment (91 percent). The texts were mere descriptions of events and positions of politicians, recycling (without added value) the original warning of NÚKIB. Only 3 percent of the texts were positive and 6 percent were identified as clearly negative.

Out of 28 positive reports, 4 of them deserve a closer look as they were a direct result of commercial articles (advertorials). The texts were placed on *denik.cz* in October 2020 and sponsored by Huawei. The online portal carried altogether five sponsored articles in the analyzed period with one being positive on 5G networks, yet neutral on the role of China in building them. The sentiment of other reporting by *denik.cz* was mostly neutral with few articles and interviews citing risks associated with Huawei products.

Equally interesting is the narrative communicated to the audience by TV Barandov. The sentiment of the media outputs was positive, critical towards the US while at the same time positive towards China. The message communicated by the television included the notion that NÚKIB's warning against Huawei slowed down the 5G buildup in the Czech Republic.²⁴

The following word cloud illustrates the distribution of the topics in the Czech media discourse on the 5G issue in connection to China. It clearly shows that the

IMAGE 2: REPRESENTATION OF KEY TOPICS CONNECTED TO 5G ISSUE AND CHINA IN CZECH MEDIA (7/2017–2020)



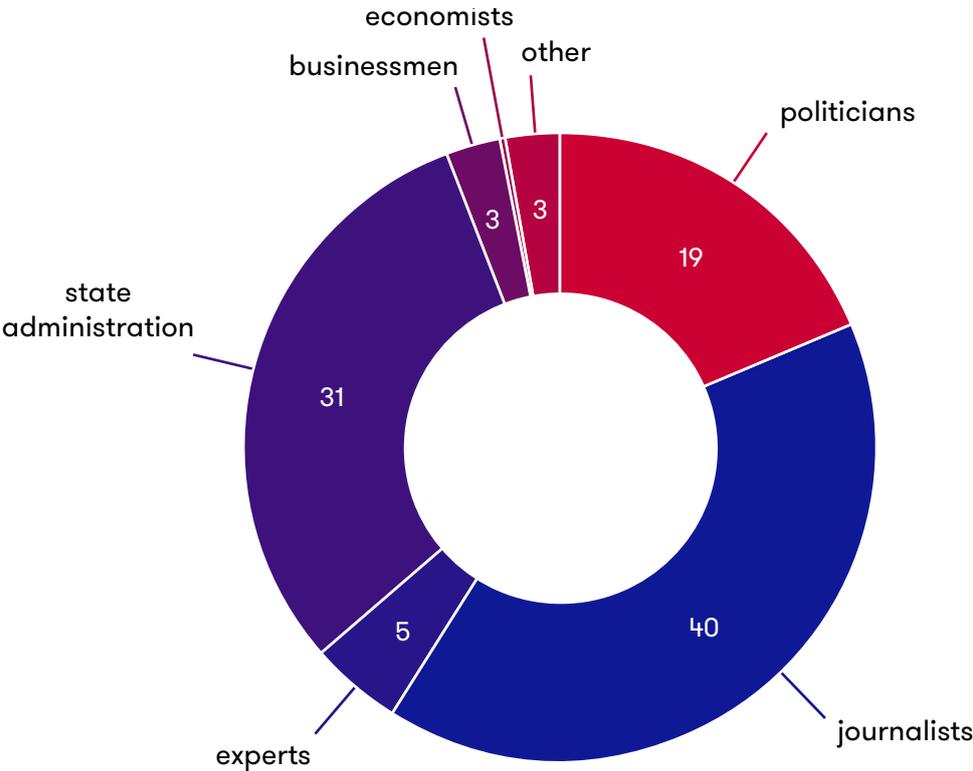
issue of security of 5G networks in the Czech Republic is mostly associated with Huawei, a Chinese telecom company with the highest share of components in local networks. Huawei is also arguably the most active Chinese telecom company in the V4 countries. ZTE and other Chinese companies have, at least so far, had less visible presence.²⁵

The majority of analyzed texts focused on security risks (such as existence of ‘back doors’ in Chinese companies’ software, China’s National Intelligence Law passed in 2017, which creates affirmative legal responsibilities for Chinese but also some foreign citizens, companies, or organizations operating in China to provide access, cooperation, or support for Beijing’s intelligence-gathering activities, cases of espionage, etc.) associated with Chinese companies’ products, Sino-American relations, cooperation within EU or NATO on solving 5G problems, position of Five Eyes countries on cooperation with China or links between Huawei and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).

Regarding agenda setters, 318 people were identified as contributing to the discourse in the analyzed period either as authors, co-authors, or quoted persons. Similarly to the issue of Chinese investment, only 44 people contributed to the discourse more than five times. Identically, the largest group constitutes journalists (40 percent) with the most active contributors being Martin Ehl, Jan Úšela, Daniel Anýž, Martin Novák (all four from *Hospodářské noviny*), Helena Truchlá (*aktualne.cz*), Jaromír Soukup (*TV Barrandov*) and Kateřina Perknerová (*denik.cz*).

Nevertheless, the key agenda setters have not been persons but institutions and state administration staff (31 percent). The most prominent one was NÚKIB itself as its report has been recycled over the analyzed period by the media. Moreover, Dušan Navrátil, the director of NÚKIB, and NÚKIB spokesperson commented on the matter

GRAPH 6: PERCENTAGE OF AGENDA SETTERS (BY OCCUPATION) IN TEXTS ON 5G ISSUE AND CHINA IN ANALYZED CZECH MEDIA OUTLETS (7/2017–2020)



in media. Czech counterintelligence service (BIS) and its director Michal Koudelka also entered the discourse. The move is quite logical given the security implications of 5G networks, yet in comparison to other countries described in this policy paper, the position of Czech institutions as agenda setters is worth noticing. Besides institutions, politicians played an important role in the discourse (19 percent), as mostly President Miloš Zeman and Prime Minister Andrej Babiš were quoted on the matter. It is particularly the interplay between the security community and these two politicians, which begs for elaboration and illustrates that the issue is not exclusively of a security character. 5G networks and Chinese companies' involvement are a part of domestic political struggle with various interests at play. Andrej Babiš endorsed the security agencies, while President Zeman vocally undermined the credibility and position of the Czech counterintelligence agency BIS and also NÚKIB on a number of occasions. In reaction to the security warning, he said that “inside Europe, there is an angry red spot, that’s the country against Huawei”.²⁶ He elaborated more when saying “these two people, Koudelka [the director of BIS] and Navrátil [the director of NÚKIB], seriously endangered economic interests of the Czech Republic” and that “after this campaign against Huawei company, China prepares retaliation which should hit a couple of areas”.²⁷ Zeman assured the audience that among the companies which are going to be targeted by the Chinese retaliation is the car maker company Skoda Auto and also PPF, a company belonging to the Czech billionaire Petr Kellner who has business interest in China. The retaliation, however, has not materialized.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The media narratives on China's investment and 5G involvement in the Czech Republic were surprisingly flat in the past three years. Both issues were dominated by journalists and politicians but the 5G narrative was also influenced by institutional players from the security community.

Media discourse on both issues mostly featured neutral sentiment. At first glance, the neutrality of the sentiment may be perceived as an advantage of the Czech discourse. However, our data do not confirm that the neutrality would be the product of a vibrant debate with careful consideration of a broad range of available arguments. The debate on Chinese investment has mostly focused on the lack of investment or the failure of the CEFC company, rather than on differentiating between welcome investment into certain sectors and areas where the Chinese investment may pose a security risk. Differentiating between the types of investment may increase both the credibility of the Czech Republic for foreign investors as well as lead towards more mature and transparent debate over Czech national economic interests.

Despite some hints in the media discourse, our analysis does not confirm an assumption that the debate on 5G issues would be primarily and directly linked to activities of external actors. The analysis revealed that the 5G debate, though internationalized and reacting to developments abroad, is primarily influenced by domestic affairs. The key component of the debate revolved around the warning of NÚKIB (with some backing of the counterintelligence agency BIS). Unlike in other Visegrád countries, the Czech discourse is specific given the prominent role of this institutional agenda setter within the discourse. Both NÚKIB and BIS warnings have been on many previous occasions downplayed by the Czech President Miloš Zeman. As a result, the 5G debate is intertwined with NÚKIB's ability to withstand the political pressure and retain its credibility.

Moreover, the media had a tendency to convey the issue as mostly technical, giving an impression that the topic should be left to decide to politicians and experts. A flat, seemingly detached debate, featuring a very small group of agenda setters, may, however, be quite easy to stir in various directions. Especially when the Chinese actors, such as the Huawei company, continue in influencing the Czech media discourse. The analysis found out that advertorials have been regularly placed on Denik.cz since October 2020 and sponsored by Huawei. Equally interesting is the narrative communicated to the audience by TV Barrandov, co-owned by the Chinese state-sponsored CITIC, which was mostly positive towards China, while critical towards the US. It is still crucial to continue in monitoring the media discourse and China's attempts to influence it. It is important to strengthen and support investigative journalism and civil society organizations forcing on China which may act as a watchdog of not only the political and economic elites' activities related to China but also the Chinese attempts to spread propaganda and disinformation in the country.

Poland: Between indifference and sensationalism

Alicja Bachulska

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For the purpose of the study, a number of Polish media outlets have been chosen according to their popularity and their ability to act as opinion makers. Some of them openly sympathize with certain sides of the political spectrum, while others are more focused on delivering subject-specific coverage, like trade and business-related news or sensational, tabloid content. In order to gain a broader understanding of the China-related coverage, five newspapers, including their online editions, and six online portals were selected for analysis. Unlike in other V4 countries covered in this study, TV and radio stations were not included due to technical difficulties in accessing Polish archives, mostly because of their low digitalization level. In terms of newspapers, *Rzeczpospolita* represented – according to IMM (Instytut Monitorowania Mediów, Polish media-monitoring institution) – the most opinion-forming daily newspaper in Poland in 2020.²⁸ It is a centrist outlet with an economic and legal focus. *Gazeta Wyborcza* was the second most opinion-forming daily newspaper in 2020.²⁹ It is a liberal, left-leaning medium with the largest number of digital subscribers in the country and the tenth largest in Europe.³⁰ *Dziennik Gazeta Prawna* (DGP) is a nationwide daily focusing on law and economy-related content, one of the most popular of its kind in Poland, while *Fakt* is one of the most popular Polish tabloids. *Puls Biznesu* is a newspaper specializing in business and economic issues. Although its circulation figures are not very high, it nevertheless caters to a specific group of influential professionals and business practitioners, thus making it an opinion-making title.³¹

Among the five online news portals, which were selected for the analysis, *Onet* represented the most opinion-making medium and the most opinion-making online news portal in Poland in 2020.³² *Wirtualna Polska* (WP) was the second³³ and *Interia* the third most opinion-making online portal in Poland in 2020.³⁴ *Forsal* was included as a representative of portals specializing in finances, economy and trade-related issues, while *wPolityce* represents a right-wing news portal covering mostly politics. *OKO.press* is a non-profit, liberal news portal specializing in investigative journalism.

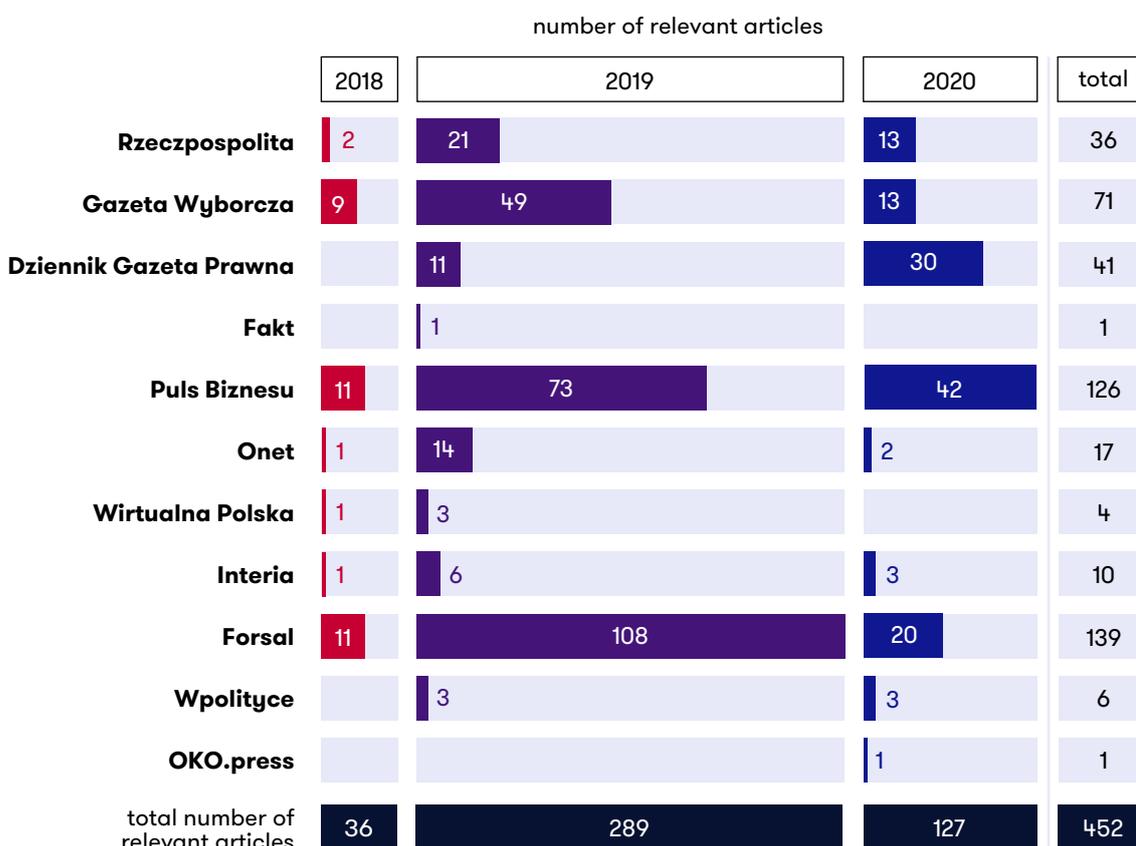
The above media outlets were screened for content related to 5G buildup and investment, both in the context of China. The resulting dataset consisted of 861 texts, among which 452 focused on 5G and China, while 409 covered Chinese investment.

POLISH DEBATE ON 5G: ANECDOTAL BOOGEYMAN TURNING INTO A PERCEIVED SECURITY THREAT

5G-related issues, as an element of public debate, are a new phenomenon in the Polish media landscape. In the previous edition of the media study carried by MapInfluenCE for the period between January 2010 and June 2018, China and technology-related topics were virtually non-existent at the macro level in Poland. However, as China began to emerge as a new high-tech powerhouse and a provider of solutions critical to the creation of new generations of the Internet, the topic started to be increasingly visible in the Polish media coverage too.

During the studied period, 452 texts on China and 5G were found in the chosen media (in total 36 were published in the second half of 2018, 289 in 2019 and 127 in 2020). In the overwhelming majority (9 out of 11) of researched media outlets, the number of published texts on the issue peaked in 2019.

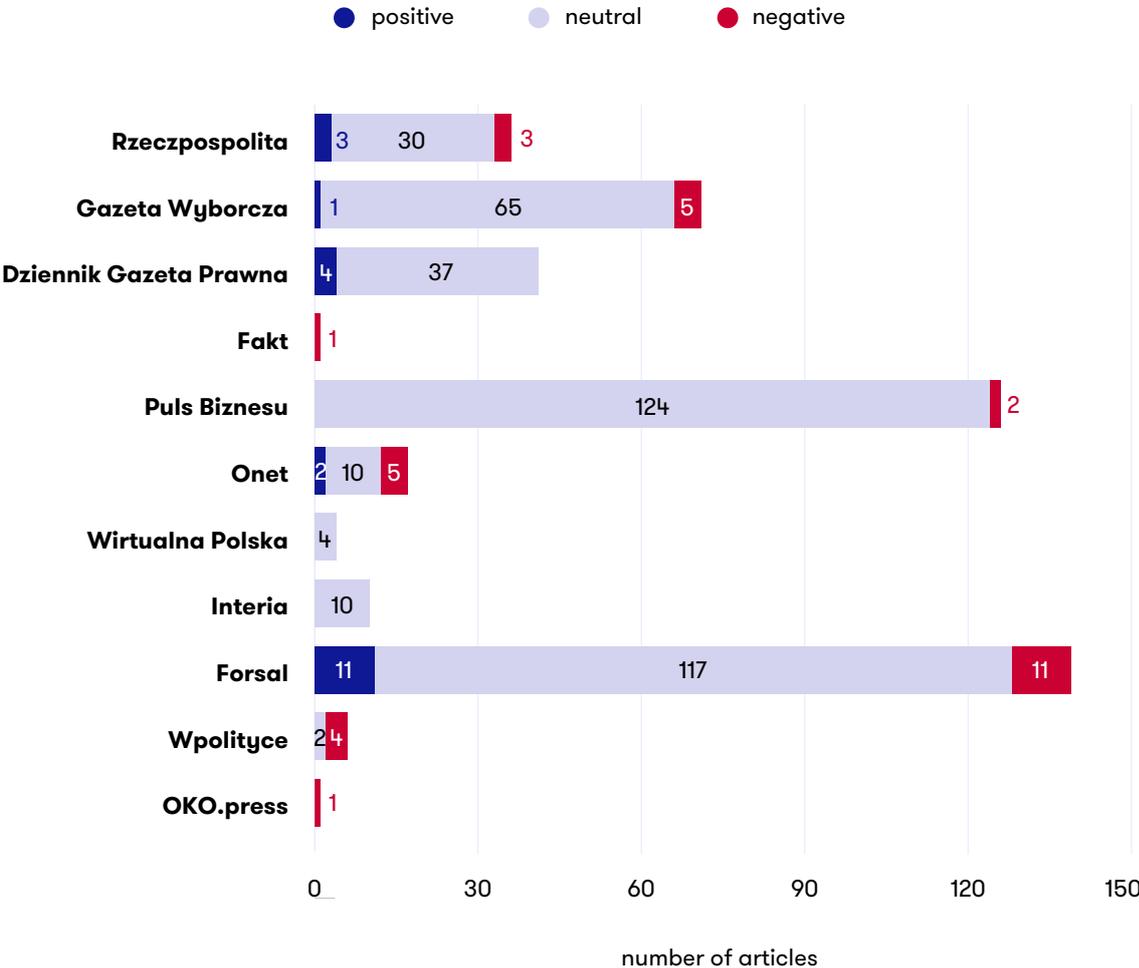
GRAPH 7: EVOLUTION OF COVERAGE OF 5G ISSUE IN CONNECTION TO CHINA IN ANALYZED POLISH MEDIA OUTLETS (7/2018–2020)



This may be attributed to the escalation of Sino-American tensions revolving around Huawei at that time as well as the arrest of an alleged Chinese spy and a Huawei employee in Warsaw in January 2019, which brought the topic to the center of public attention for some time. In terms of type, short news dominated over other forms of writing, with 327 pieces in total (compared to 91 articles, 16 commentaries and 18 interviews). When it comes to their tone, most were neutral (399 pieces rep-

resenting over 88 percent of the whole sample), while positive and negative coverage was rare, albeit the latter was nevertheless more prevalent (21 positive texts vs. 32 negative). Positive coverage was to a large degree the result of Huawei's PR efforts as it came from interviews with Huawei representatives or Chinese diplomats (like the firm's founder Ren Zhengfei,³⁵ Ryszard Hordyński from Huawei Poland³⁶ or China's ambassador to Poland Liu Guangyuan³⁷) and some rare examples of sponsored content. Negative sentiment sometimes prevailed in opinion pieces that referred to some hawkish public figures or were direct interviews with them (for example retired US Air Force Brigadier General Robert Spalding, a former Trump administration advisor known for his Sino-sceptic views³⁸).

GRAPH 8: SENTIMENT OF TEXTS ON 5G ISSUE IN CONNECTION TO CHINA IN ANALYZED POLISH MEDIA OUTLETS (7/2018-2020)



Huawei and, to a much lesser extent, ZTE were the two companies that appeared in almost all articles that touched upon the topic of 5G and China in the Polish media. The former was mentioned in 96 percent of analyzed media production (434 texts), while the latter in over 16 percent (74 pieces). Initially, the two Chinese companies came up mostly in relation to mounting diplomatic tensions between Beijing and Washington as Donald Trump accelerated his efforts aimed at containing China's rise, also in the technological realm, by imposing restrictions on their operations in the US. In Decem-

ber 2018, Meng Wanzhou, Huawei's CFO and the daughter of the firm's founder, was arrested in Canada and charged with fraud for allegedly circumventing US sanctions against Iran.³⁹ The event made the headlines in Poland. Yet a month later, a bigger scandal broke out: a Chinese Huawei employee and a Polish national were arrested in Warsaw on allegations of spying for China.⁴⁰ Looking back in time, the event served as a catalyst for the development of the domestic debate on 5G and China's involvement in the process. The so-called "spying scandal" appeared in over 12 percent of all pieces covering China and 5G in the studied dataset sample. Over time, security risks and cyber threats (mentioned in almost 81 percent of texts) as well as the role of the US (present in close to 80 percent of the sample) became the most prevalent topics within this debate. As the rivalry between Beijing and Washington accelerated and its effects spilled over to third countries, Polish media began to cover domestic legal and political moves and adjustments aimed at balancing Warsaw's relations with both China and the US. In total, over 19 percent of all studied texts referred to Polish government's plans to control and protect domestic 5G networks, also in the context of perceived threat coming from the firms with alleged ties to the Chinese government. Topics such as the role of domestic telecommunications providers (like Orange, Play, T-Mobile or Plus) and their cooperation with Huawei, potential costs of Huawei's exclusion and the general economic impact of 5G also started to be touched upon in the media. Evolving stories concerning Huawei's treatment in different countries (especially Germany, the UK, and among the US allies) were monitored, with major developments covered quite extensively. When breakthrough documents were endorsed by the EU (EU 5G Toolbox) or Poland (US-Poland agreement on 5G cooperation), the media also reported on that. However, a lot of the coverage was purely informative, with few attempts to engage more critically with the topic and the events or processes surrounding it. A lot of coverage assumed a rather simplistic perspective in which the US was pressuring Poland to make decisions in line with Washington's interests, with very little room left for Warsaw's own agency in decision-making processes.

Interestingly, Russia was also referred to more often than it might have been expected in the context of 5G and China: it appeared in over 10 percent of all studied texts. Oftentimes, it was mentioned in relation to its potential cooperation with Beijing in terms of creating international initiatives competing with the Western-led institutions, norms and standards.

When it comes to specific media outlets, dailies and their online editions were more interested in 5G and China than their purely web-based counterparts. In the studied sample, almost 61 percent of all texts on the issue appeared in the former. In *Gazeta Wyborcza*, the coverage was mostly neutral, with a few negative exceptions and only one positive interview with Ren Zhengfei, which was a reprint from the Italian outlet *La Repubblica*.⁴¹ The coverage centered around the spying incident in Poland and the role of the US in limiting Huawei's international expansion. In *Rzeczpospolita*, 5G and China were also largely portrayed in a neutral light. However, among the rare positive pieces, one article was officially published "in cooperation with Huawei".⁴² It concerned the 6th edition of *Seeds for the Future*, a competition organized by the Chinese company in cooperation with several Polish universities. Despite its overall neutral tone, *Rzeczpospolita* became the top outlet when it comes

IMAGE 3: REPRESENTATION OF KEY TOPICS CONNECTED TO 5G ISSUE AND CHINA IN POLISH MEDIA OUTLETS (7/2018–2020)



to the appearances of texts written in cooperation with the Chinese embassy in Warsaw, with quite a few interviews and op-eds by Chinese diplomats appearing on its pages, most prominently by the Chinese ambassador to Poland Liu Guangyuan. Dziennik Gazeta Prawna also published a few surprisingly positive articles backed up by comments of Grzegorz Czelej, the chairman of the Sino-Polish Parliamentary Group, who defended Huawei's position on the Polish market by promoting a "pragmatic approach" towards cooperation with China. Given his affiliation, the tone of these pieces should not be surprising. Fakt, one of the most popular Polish tabloids, published one single text related to 5G and China. It was especially surprising given the highly politicized nature of the topic and its potential to generate sensational headlines. The online version of the daily Puls Biznesu and its coverage was similar to that from other sources in terms of the sentiment, however, in terms of length, short news prevailed in it. Many texts were based solely on information from Reuters or Bloomberg, without any comments or opinions from their Polish authors. This way, a lot of coverage seemed to be unreflective of the local context of the 5G rollout and its intricacies.

As far as online portals are concerned, Forsal published the biggest volume of 5G and China-related pieces (139 in total). Yet again, they were mostly reprints from the Polish Press Agency (PAP) and other media outlets, both domestic and foreign (for example Bloomberg or Dziennik Gazeta Prawna). Meanwhile, the number of relevant pieces published for Onet was limited to 17, yet the majority of them had a longer, more in-depth format. Some of them were translated reprints of articles from foreign outlets like Politico, while others were original, longer interviews and commentaries. The range of opinions and voices on the topic was really broad: from very positive (like pieces produced by the Chinese ambassador to Poland) to very negative (such as pieces by the ex-NATO deputy chief, highly critical of China). The remaining four portals (Interia, Wirtualna Polska, Wpolarityce and OKO.press) paid close to no attention to 5G and China, with less than 10 articles on the topic published within the studied

period in each of them. The only noteworthy development was an interview with Georgette Mosbacher, the US ambassador to Poland, published in *Interia*, which was directly mentioning Huawei as a potential security threat.

In terms of agenda setters, authors, co-authors as well as individuals they referred to in their texts were analyzed in order to single out those most active and visible, thus contributing to opinion-making.⁴³

Among those, two journalists stood out: Elżbieta Rutkowska from *Dziennik Gazeta Prawna* and Sylwia Czubkowska from *Gazeta Wyborcza*. Rutkowska authored 34 pieces referring to 5G and China, in which she covered the ongoing changes in terms of Huawei's treatment both in Poland and in other countries. Czubkowska published 32 texts on the topic and, over time, became the most prominent and probably the only author specializing in China, especially in the context of new technologies.⁴⁴ Each of the big dailies in Poland seems to have authors covering China (e.g., Maria Kruczkowska, Joanna Sosnowska or Paweł Hekman in *Gazeta Wyborcza*; Urszula Zielińska, Hubert Kozieł and Jędrzej Bielecki in *Rzeczpospolita*), but 5G is not their main area of interest and its coverage is not extensive. As far as individuals referred to in texts are concerned, these were mostly politicians and officials from ministries (such as Poland's president, prime minister or ministers of digitalization) as well as Huawei's representatives, most prominently Ryszard Hordyński, the firm's strategy and communications director for Poland. Experts and academics were mentioned very rarely and if so, they were mostly foreign and quoted in reference to their appearances in Western European or American media.

CHINESE INVESTMENT: POLAND'S DREAM THAT NEVER CAME TRUE

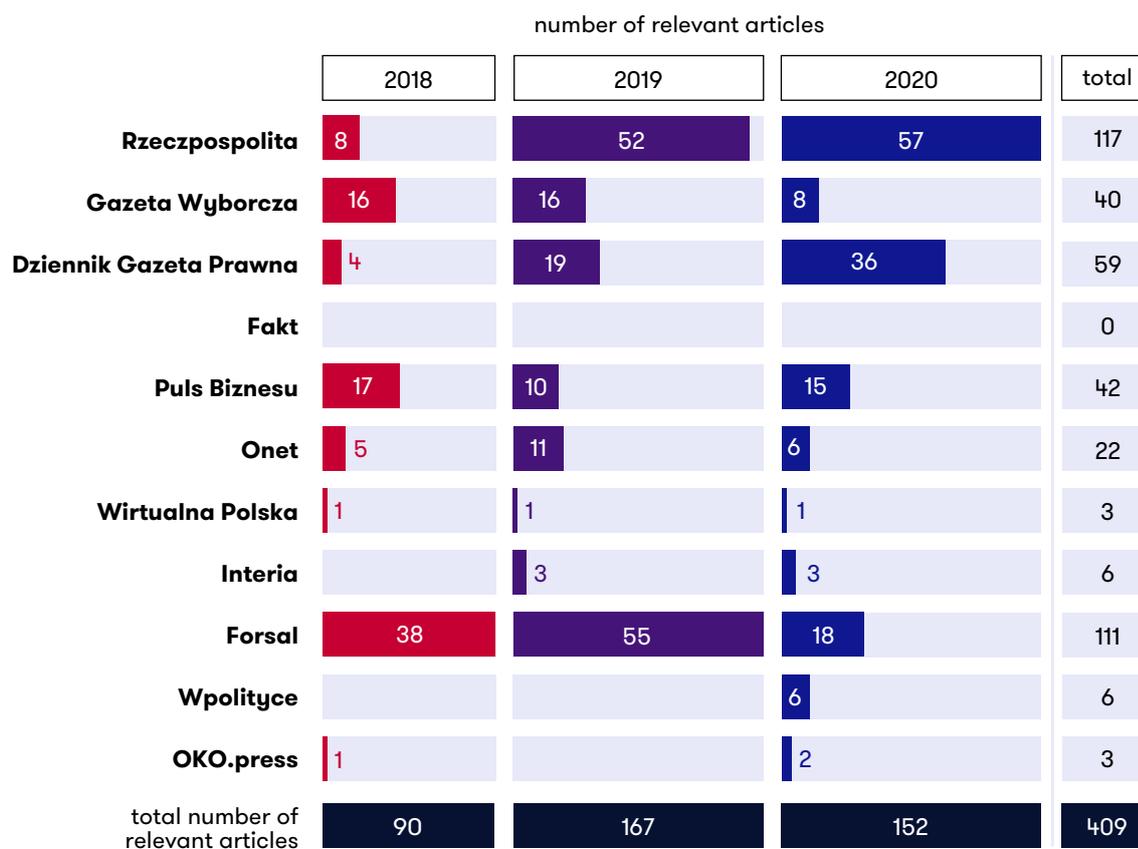
Chinese investment was already among the most prevalent China-related topics in the Polish media prior to the current study period.⁴⁵ From 2010 to 2018, potential economic benefits of Poland's cooperation with China and a generally positive outlook towards these prospects were dominant in the media coverage. However, in the most recent period, these attitudes have clearly started to change.

During the analyzed timeframe, 409 texts on Chinese investment were found in the selected media (in total 90 were published in the second half of 2018, 167 in 2019, and 152 in 2020).

Media interest in the subject was more or less stable throughout the studied period. Neutral coverage prevailed, with 354 texts in total, representing over 86 percent of the whole dataset. Simultaneously, there were considerably more negative texts (38, more than 9 percent of all) than positive ones (17 in total, 4 percent of the sample). Compared to the 5G issue, there were more articles than news (218 vs. 156) and only a few commentaries and interviews (20 and 15 respectively).

Interestingly, the focus of many of these articles shifted towards strategic and security implications of Chinese investment instead of covering perceived benefits only, as it was the case in the previously studied period. Security-related issues were mentioned in over 36 percent of all analyzed texts. Moreover, in more than 40 percent of all pieces, Chinese investment was in one way or another depicted against the backdrop of the role of the US on the international arena. As far as specific investment areas

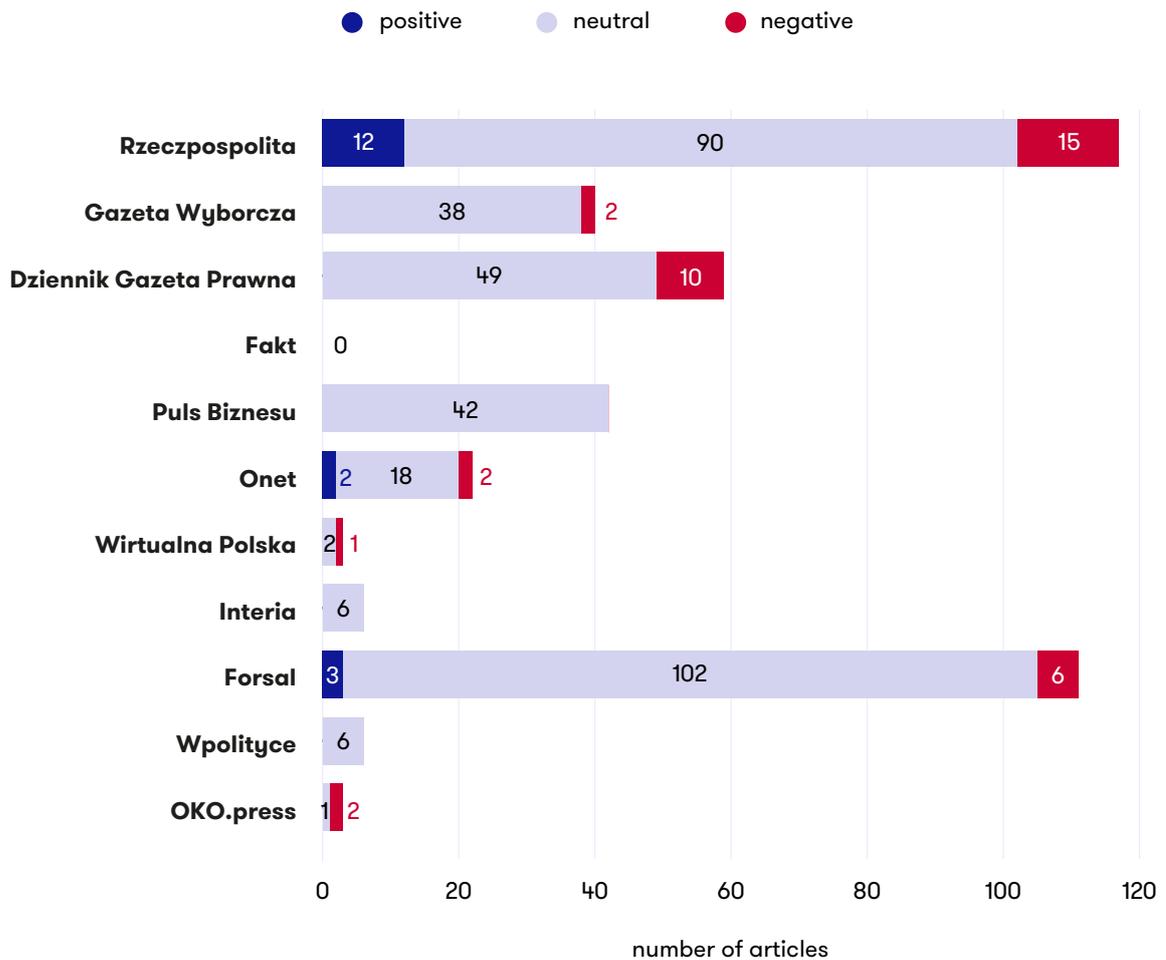
GRAPH 9: EVOLUTION OF COVERAGE OF CHINESE INVESTMENT IN ANALYZED POLISH MEDIA OUTLETS (7/2018–2020)



are concerned, infrastructure, innovations (artificial intelligence, Internet of Things, cloud computing) and energy sector appeared as the top three most mentioned topics. Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) also attracted a lot of attention as it appeared in more than 26 percent of all texts, marking continuity with the previously studied period. Nevertheless, new topics also emerged, such as technology transfer and intellectual property rights violations (present in 13 percent of pieces) or Chinese companies' bad practices (mentioned in over 12 percent of texts). As the EU began to perceive China as not only an economic partner, but also a strategic rival, Polish media also started to cover issues such as planned restrictions on Chinese investment in Europe or calls for trade and investment reciprocity on the Chinese market, albeit to a limited extent and mostly in the form of short news.

When it comes to the division of content between traditional outlets and online-based media, the former were yet again more interested in covering Chinese investment than the latter – 63 percent of all texts concerning this issue were published in traditional newspapers. Although the prevailing sentiment was neutral, soon after the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak, the number of negative texts started to rise in some outlets such as Rzeczpospolita. Nevertheless, even then, the daily gave the platform to the Chinese ambassador to Poland, Liu Guangyuan, and Grzegorz Kołodko, Polish former minister of finance and economics and a professor, who advocates for stronger ties with China. Therefore, it seems that the newspaper has tried to position itself as an objective voice on China-related issues. However, by giving the floor to opposing

GRAPH 10: SENTIMENT OF TEXTS ON CHINESE INVESTMENT IN ANALYZED POLISH MEDIA OUTLETS (7/2018–2020)



voices without critically debating and contrasting them, it risks being perceived as a medium legitimizing these politically charged positions.

Apart from short news based on quotes from foreign news agencies, *Rzeczpospolita* also published longer, original pieces, especially on the Chinese investment in Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia and the rivalry between AliExpress and Polish e-commerce companies. Most articles from *Gazeta Wyborcza* were complex, longer reads with more critical comments and authors' perspectives included. The vast majority of them was written by the same couple of authors who specialize in China-related topics (such as Andrzej Kublik or Maria Kruczkowska). *Gazeta Wyborcza* also featured a number of translated reprints from the *Wall Street Journal*, thus directly copying content created in the US. *Dziennik Gazeta Prawna* was also mostly neutral in its coverage, with a number of more critical texts related to China's mask diplomacy and defective medical equipment sold abroad at the beginning of the pandemic. Just as in the case of 5G and China-related coverage, *Puls Biznesu* published almost only short news, which represented over 90 percent of the topic's coverage. The outlet seems not to have any opinion-making ambitions and serves as a purely informative medium. Despite its business focus, *Puls Biznesu* reported surprisingly little on Chinese investment in Poland. Instead, it covered the Sino-American trade

IMAGE 4: REPRESENTATION OF KEY TOPICS CONNECTED TO CHINESE INVESTMENT IN ANALYZED POLISH MEDIA OUTLETS (7/2018–2020)



war and technological competition's impact on Chinese investment trends. Finally, the popular tabloid Fakt published no texts on the topic, yet again marking its complete lack of interest in China-related issues.

Online portals' interest in Chinese investment in the studied period was surprisingly limited. Only 37 percent of all analyzed texts regarding this topic appeared on web portals. Short news dominated the coverage. In the majority of outlets, little attention was paid to Chinese investment in Poland and Central and Eastern Europe in general. Only Forsal reported more extensively on those, but others did not use the topic as a crucial component of their coverage, but rather as an element illustrating the Sino-American global rivalry and its impact in third countries (e.g. China limiting its investment abroad due to the conflict with the US). Over time, Onet focused increasingly on publishing translated reprints from Politico, with close to no original content by local authors. This way, much of the outlet's discourse reflected Western European and American voices and their focus on transatlantic relations seen from a more liberal angle. Nevertheless, Onet also consequently published commentary pieces by the Chinese ambassador to Poland throughout 2020. Other web-based outlets published just a few pieces directly referring to the issue of Chinese investment.

As far as agenda setters are concerned, these were mostly journalists and politicians, in many cases foreign. Many articles were anonymous, especially the short pieces. Some of the agenda setters were the same as in the case of 5G and China-related media narratives. Among those featured most often were Hubert Koziel, Piotr Mazurkiewicz and Jędrzej Bielecki (Rzeczpospolita), Andrzej Kublik and Maria Kruczkowska (Gazeta Wyborcza) or Elżbieta Rutkowska, Jakub Japiszewski and Krzysztof Śmietana (Dziennik Gazeta Prawna). The longest and most complex pieces, however, were largely written by foreign authors and translated into Polish as part of official content-sharing agreements between certain outlets, for example Gazeta Wyborcza and the Wall Street Journal⁴⁶ or Onet and Politico, which both started in 2017.⁴⁷ This is by no means a negative trend, as it allows more Polish readers to access

content that might have been previously unavailable to them. However, the relative lack of interest in China-related investigative journalism among Polish authors is nevertheless noticeable.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Between the second half of 2018 and the end of 2020, Polish media narratives on China and 5G as well as Chinese investment were found to be largely neutral in tone, although the portion of positive articles was also much smaller compared to the previously studied period. This seems to reflect the change of attitude towards China in Poland, evident also at the level of diplomatic relations with Beijing, which loosened in the last three years as a result of Warsaw's strategic considerations and disillusionment with the lack of tangible results of cooperation with China. Just as in the previous edition the intensification of Sino-Polish relations in years 2011-2016 had resulted in more media coverage of trade and investment issues, currently the weakening of ties between Warsaw and Beijing seems to result in less enthusiastic coverage and general decline in interest in the topic.

Polish media's focus has shifted towards strategic and security implications of Chinese economic presence and ties with the outside world, which are largely seen by the media as an element of the Sino-American strategic competition. The topic of Chinese investment per se was of secondary importance to other themes, such as the US-China trade war or the relations between the European Union and the US. As far as China and 5G are concerned, security issues and the role of the US also came to the forefront, despite many efforts by Huawei representatives and Chinese diplomats to soften the image of the Chinese company.

The Polish China-related media discourse on 5G and investment is predominantly led by journalists and politicians, not experts and academics. Also, a large portion of it comes from foreign outlets, mostly Western European and American, or is based on content copied directly from Polish and international press agencies. Simplistic, short news articles prevail over longer pieces, with close to no examples of investigative journalism. A lot of coverage assumed a rather simplistic perspective in which the US was pressuring Poland to make decisions in line with Washington's interests, with very little room left for Warsaw's own agency in decision-making processes. What seemed troubling was that many outlets gave floor to highly politicized voices (e.g. Chinese diplomats or American politicians) without critically debating and contrasting their arguments, thus risking being perceived as media legitimizing these radical positions.

Despite its growing influence, China-related subjects remain at the margins of the media discourse in Poland, with seemingly limited interest among local authors in contributing to the domestic as well as international debate on China's rise. Nevertheless, some names stood out in recent years, with Sylwia Czubkowska becoming the most prominent and probably the only author specializing in China in the context of new technologies.

Investigative journalism should be supported and encouraged as the need for an informed and facts-based public debate on China in Poland is growing year by year.

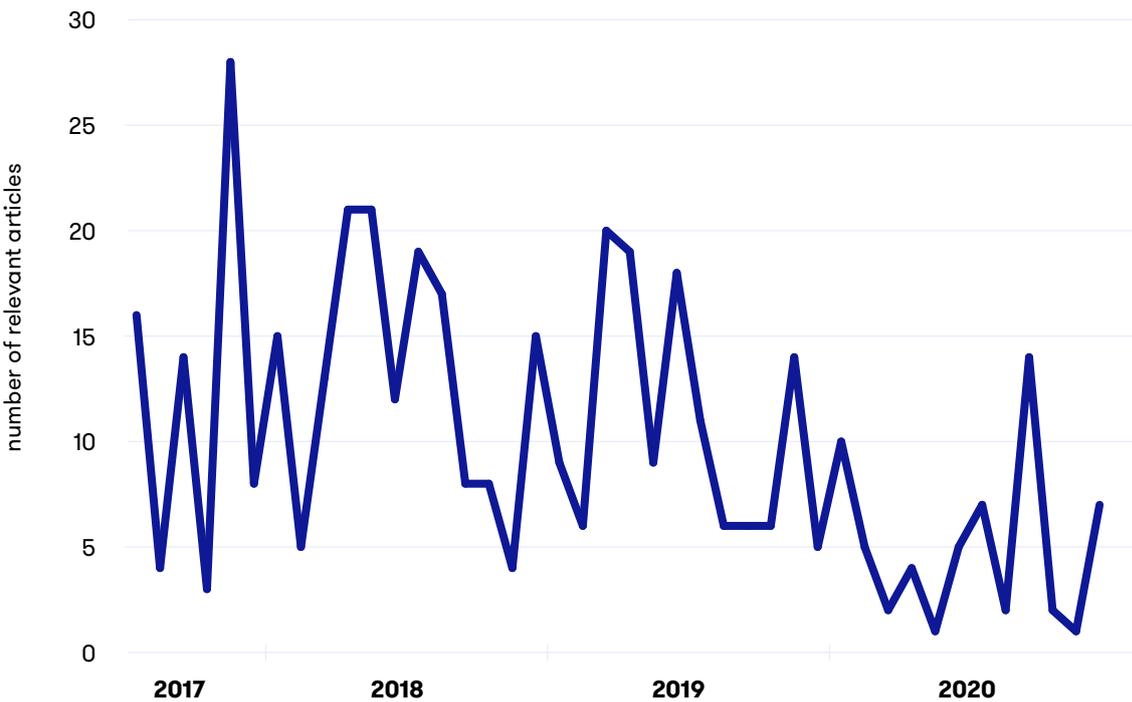
Slovakia: A transnationally fostered discourse

Matej Šimalčík

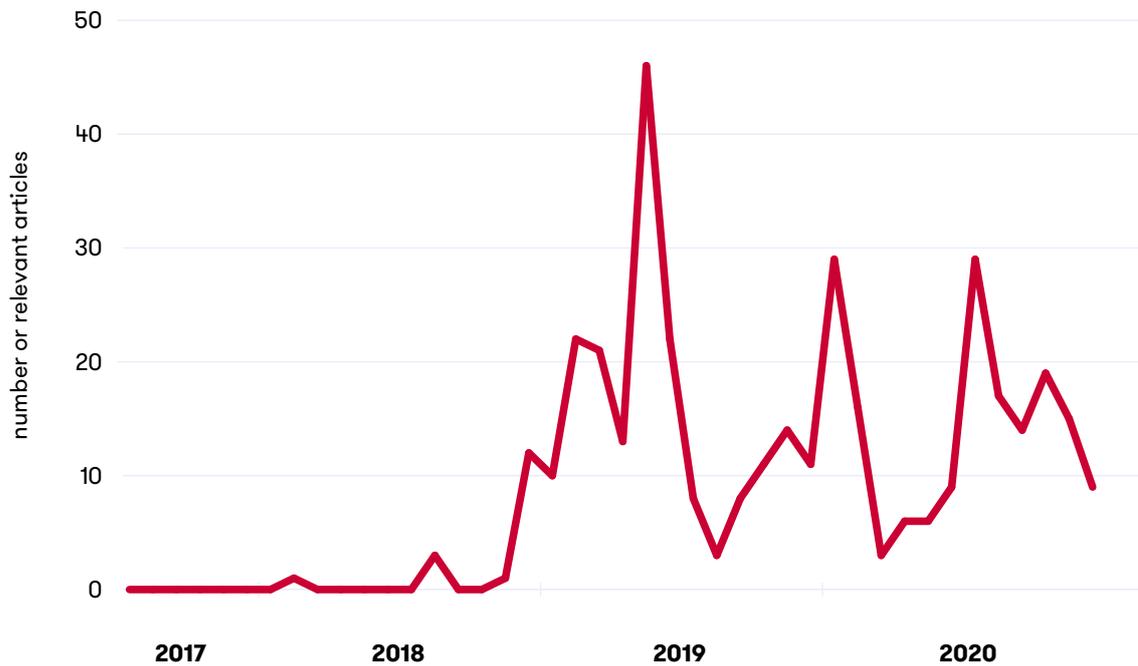
Central European Institute of Asian Studies (CEIAS)

For a long time, China has been a marginalized topic in Slovak public discourse, largely lying outside the interest of Slovak politicians. Slovak political scene was dominated by a single political party (SMER-SD) since 2006 until early 2020,⁴⁸ that had a strongly economy-focused outlook on China, treating security and human rights as issues that are contrary to Slovakia's economic interests. Election of Zuzana Čaputová as Slovak President in 2019, and broader political change after the 2020 general election, had a profound influence on how politicians approach China. Their public statements on China are increasingly framed in terms of security and human rights, while questioning the extent of economic benefits Slovakia reaped from interacting with China in the past.⁴⁹ Previous research into media narratives on China in Slovakia done by MapInfluenCE project (focusing on the period from January 2010 to June 2017) revealed that media coverage of China focused mostly on economic topics (e.g. China's economic growth, economic policy, etc.), and not that much on Sino-Slovak

GRAPH 11: EVOLUTION OF COVERAGE OF CHINESE INVESTMENT IN ANALYZED SLOVAK MEDIA OUTLETS (7/2017-2020)



GRAPH 12: EVOLUTION OF COVERAGE OF 5G ISSUE IN CONNECTION TO CHINA IN ANALYZED SLOVAK MEDIA OUTLETS (7/2017–2020)



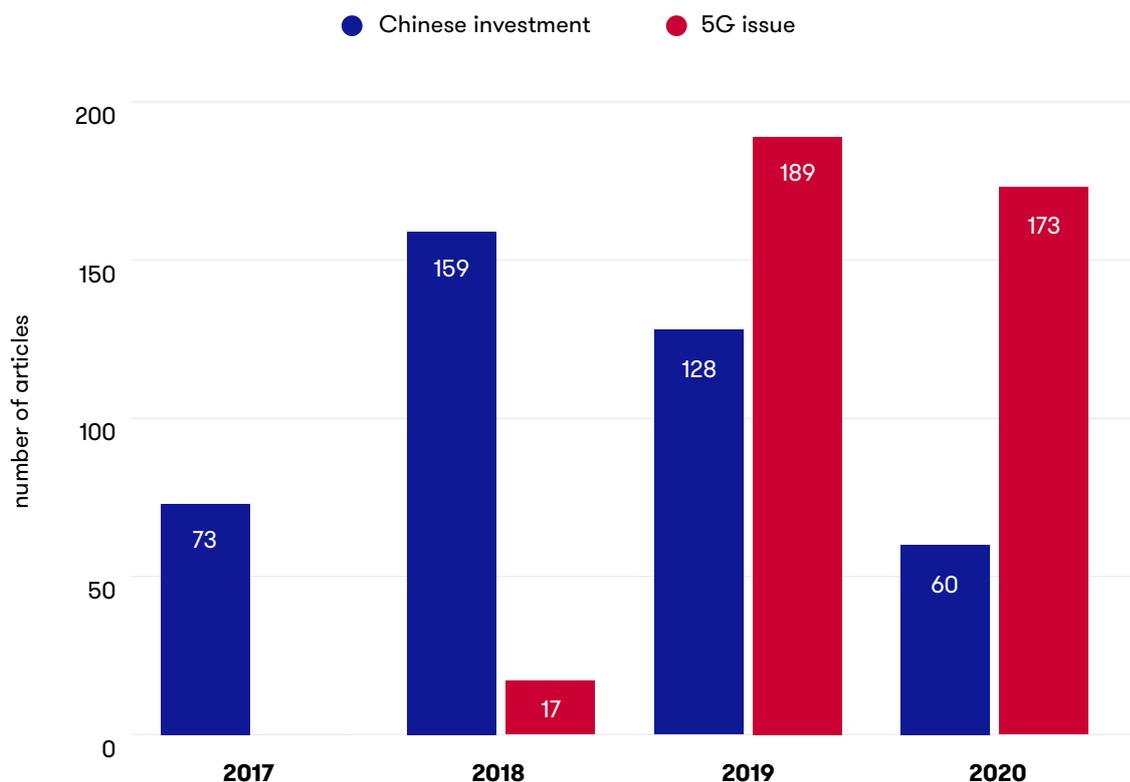
relations, or political topics (e.g. human rights, security, etc.). At the same time, the discourse was largely neutral and more negative than positive articles were found in the dataset on China.⁵⁰ However, as Slovakia underwent a political change recently, and China is increasingly on the political agenda in Slovakia, a further analysis of media discourse in the country is warranted.

The investigation of the media narratives on the Chinese involvement in the 5G network buildup and Chinese investment was conducted on the most followed Slovak media outlets. The three most-read dailies (Nový čas, Plus jeden deň, and Pravda), three radio stations (Radio Slovakia, Fun Radio, and Radio Expres), three TV stations (Markíza, JOJ, and STV1), and three online news portals (aktuality.sk, a tabloid topky.sk and sme.sk, an online portal run by the SME daily) were selected for the analysis according to the size of their audience. Using the Newton media database, we have identified 420 articles on Chinese investment and 379 articles which discussed Chinese involvement in 5G buildup.

The two researched topics show opposing trends in the attention the media pay to them. In the covered period, we see a decreasing trend in the coverage of Chinese investment. The coverage of Chinese investment in 2020 was approximately one-third of the coverage the issue received in 2018. This trend coincides with a more sober view on the potential of attracting Chinese investment that we have seen the past three years among Slovak politicians and experts.⁵¹

On the other hand, China's involvement in 5G buildup gained growing coverage in the same period. Similarly to the Czech Republic, 5G became a real topic for the Slovak media in 2019. In 2018, Slovak media outlets included in our analysis published mere 17 articles on China and the 5G issue, while next year, the number has increased

GRAPH 13: COMPARISON OF THE VOLUME OF TEXTS ON 5G ISSUE AND CHINESE INVESTMENT IN ANALYZED SLOVAK MEDIA OUTLETS



eleven-fold, recording as many as 189 articles. Since then, the topic has been a staple in the coverage of China.

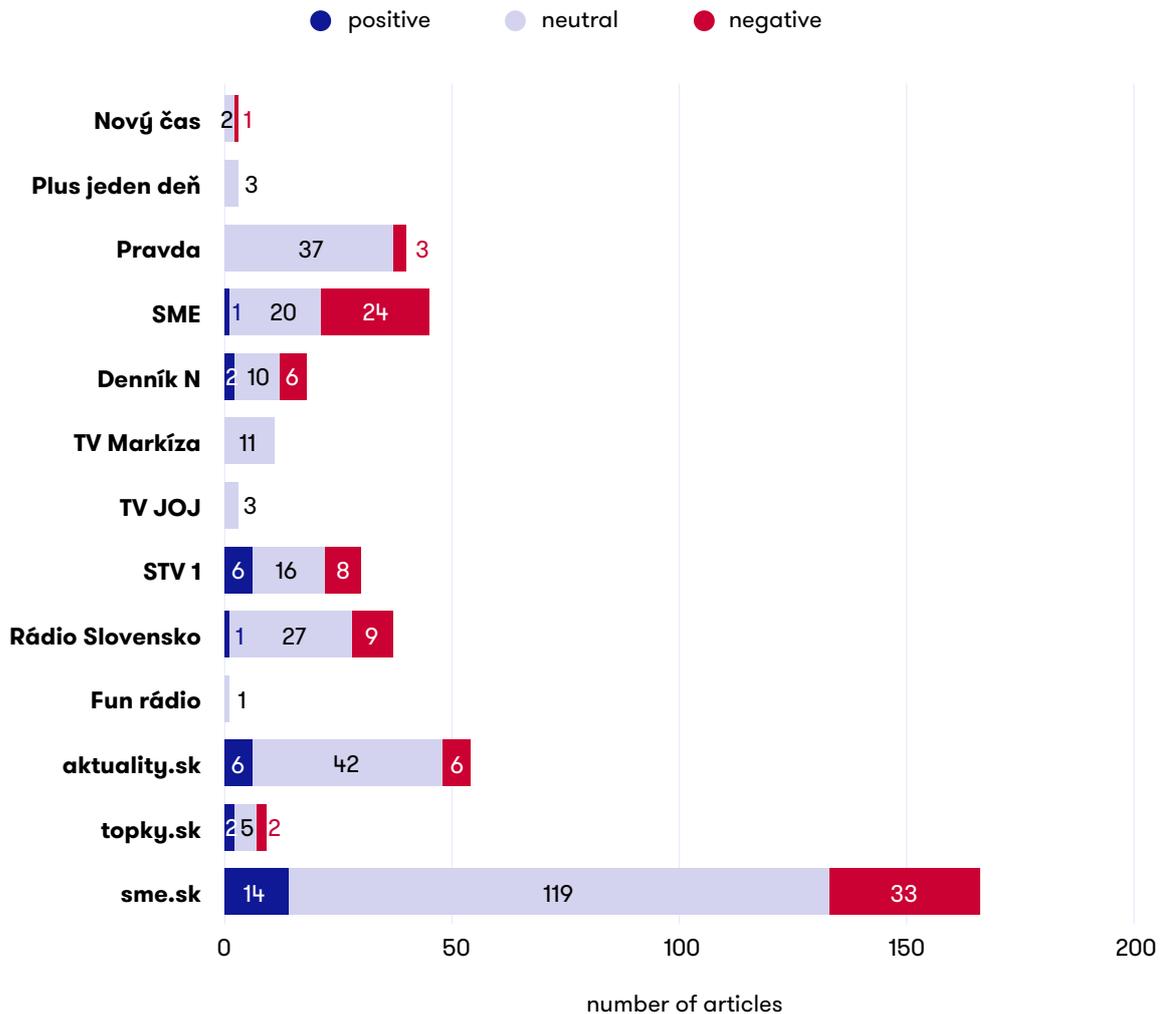
The increasing trend of covering China in connection to 5G has been driven by the global discussions on cybersecurity, especially among Slovakia’s NATO allies and co-members of the EU. The biggest coverage was recorded in May 2019, following the executive order by US President Donald Trump, which effectively banned all interaction between US companies and Huawei. Despite 5G receiving more traction in the last two years than the topic of Chinese investment, we could still observe a small decline in the number of texts discussing China and the 5G issue in 2020 compared to 2019. This is most likely due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, where media attention paid to China likely shifted focus on pandemic-related topics.

As for the individual media outlets, China-related topics were only rarely covered by TV and radio stations, as well as various tabloid media, despite being the main opinion-forming platforms in the country.

WHEN THE ROMANCE FADES

Neutral coverage in the media prevails on both topics, with negative coverage being more frequent than positive one. Interestingly, the topic of Chinese investment attracts more negative coverage compared to the 5G issue, probably due to the fact that the issue of Chinese investment has a longer history in Slovak public discourse,

GRAPH 14: SENTIMENT OF TEXTS ON CHINESE INVESTMENT IN ANALYZED SLOVAK MEDIA OUTLETS (7/2017–2020)

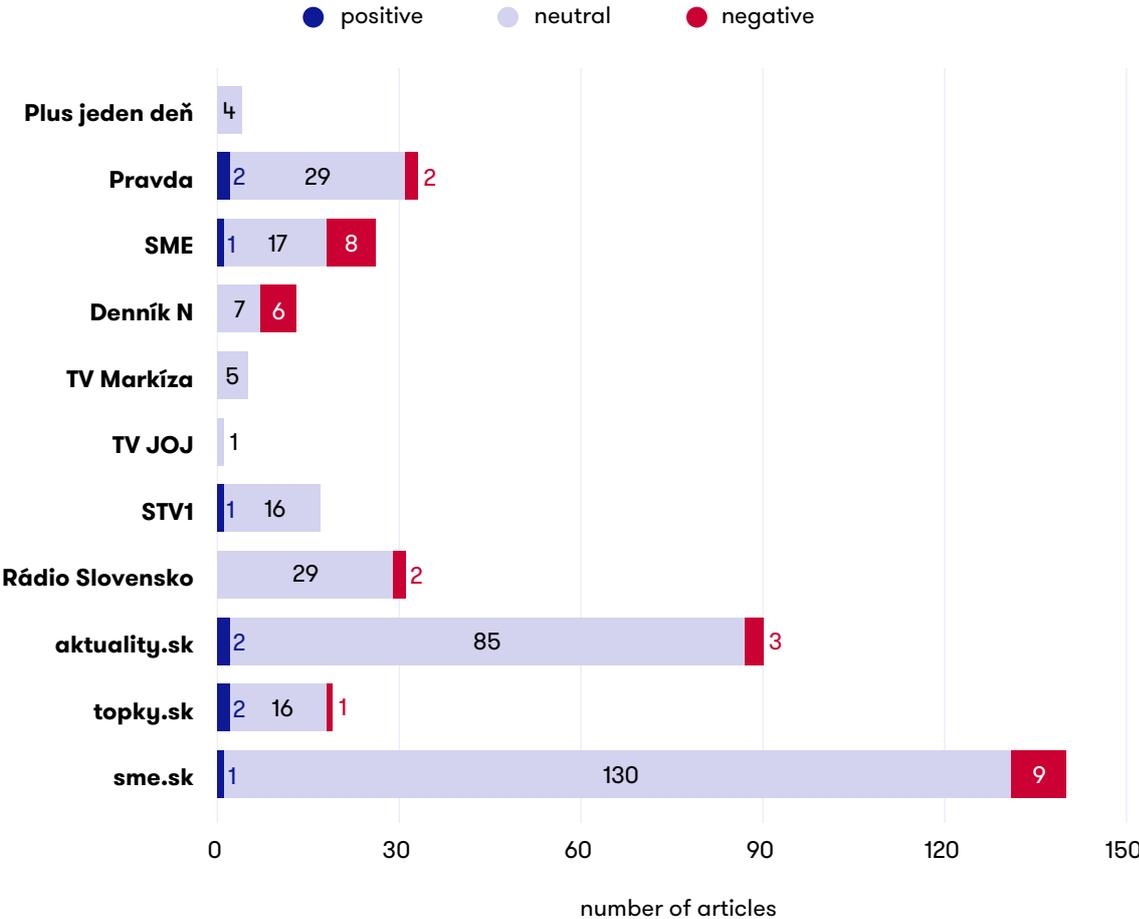


Careful or careless? Debating Chinese investment and 5G technology in Central Europe

hence the discussion has had time to evolve into a more spirited debate compared to the quite new topic of 5G.

From the analyzed texts, which dealt with Chinese investment, 71 percent were coded as neutral, 22 percent articles were coded as negative, while only 8 percent of articles covered the topic positively. While in 2017, only 14 percent of texts on Chinese investment were negative, in 2020 the share of negative articles has basically doubled (28 percent). At the same time, the positive coverage of Chinese investment increased until 2019, when the positive share was at its highest (10 percent) and then sharply dropped to a mere 2 percent a year later. The sharp drop in positive coverage of Chinese investment can be attributed to a domestic political change, which happened in Slovakia in early 2020. Until March 2020, Slovakia was ruled by a governing coalition with SMER – Social Democracy as a senior partner. SMER – Social Democracy dominated Slovak politics since 2006, with a short-lived intermezzo in the 2010-2012 period. Politicians of SMER, as well as one of its junior partners (Slovak National Party), have been known to take on pro-Chinese positions in foreign affairs, repeatedly lauding the potential of Chinese investment in Slovakia. The new government of Slovakia, which took power after the February 2020 general election,

GRAPH 15: SENTIMENT OF TEXTS ON 5G ISSUE IN CONNECTION TO CHINA IN ANALYZED SLOVAK MEDIA OUTLETS (7/2017–2020)



is composed of right-off-center political parties, which take a more skeptical view of China and potential Chinese investment in Slovakia and have been known to raise concerns over potential security risks connected to them.

Compared to the discourse on Chinese investment, the media coverage of China and 5G was less polarized – as many as 90 percent of articles were neutral, with only 8 percent being negative and 2 percent were positive.

China’s presence in 5G network construction is a relatively new topic in Slovak media discourse, as it started to appear only in 2018. While the number of articles published in 2018 has been low, it is still notable that there were no negative articles published that year. A significant majority of 2018 coverage was neutral (88 percent), while 12 percent of articles were positive. Only two years later, in 2020, the situation was significantly different – some 12 percent of articles published were negative, while only 3 percent of articles on China and 5G had a positive narrative (remainder were neutral).

Still, even though the overall narrative on China has been getting more negative over time, the examined media differ a lot in the way they covered the two topics. Media, which have had a reputation of being close to the SMER – Social Democracy government, tended to be slightly more positive in their China coverage compared to the media that are known to be more critical of SMER. To illustrate, consider the

public TV broadcaster's channel STV1, where no negative pieces on China and 5G were broadcasted. From among the privately run dailies (excluding tabloids), Pravda newspaper stands out compared to its competition (SME, Dennik N). While Pravda's coverage of either topic has not been particularly positive, its coverage oscillated in the neutral area (93 percent of investment articles and 88 percent of 5G texts). At the same time, the two other dailies have recorded a significantly negative sentiment in their coverage. One-third of articles on investment and 46 percent of articles on 5G printed in Dennik N had a negative outlook, while 53 percent of investment-focused articles and 31 percent of articles on China and 5G that appeared in SME were negative. It should be noted though that Dennik N had a higher portion of positive articles on investment compared to Pravda.

While tabloid media devoted much less space to the China-related topic, the way they report on them still warrants scrutiny, as they attract a much larger share of the population compared to traditional media. Previous MapInfluCE research found out that tabloids tend to cover China in a very different manner compared to the rest of the media, being significantly more negative and even surpassing the share of neutral pieces.⁵² However, our current research shows that this does not hold for specific topics of Chinese investment and 5G. In this instance, their coverage does not differ significantly from the other media as the neutral coverage has prevailed. On 5G, the tabloids had 87 percent of neutral articles, followed by 9 percent of positive pieces, and 4 percent of negative ones. On investment, two-thirds of articles were neutral, with the remaining 20 percent being negative and 13 percent being positive.

An interesting trend emerges when you consider the SME newspaper and their accompanying online portal (only one such medium was included in the Slovak dataset). Regarding both topics, the print version of the newspaper had substantially more negative coverage compared to the online version. More than half of the articles on Chinese investment which appeared in the print version of SME carried a negative sentiment, while only 20 percent were negative in the online outlet. The coverage of 5G follows the same logic. The reason for this seems to be quite straight forward. Online media, due to their virtually unlimited capacity, tend to carry more day-to-day news compared to their print form, which tends to focus more on articles providing wider context, deeper analysis, and value-based evaluation of the covered topic. This can be evidenced by the number of articles attributed to the press agency TASR (as it generally sticks to stating the news of the day without commenting on them) – while in the online version of SME over 40 percent of articles were attributed to TASR, none appeared in the print version. Further research would have to be carried out to confirm this trend with other media having both an online and print version.

BETWEEN RISKS AND ECONOMIC TRADE-OFFS

In both topics, the media coverage raised a plethora of sub-themes. Altogether, we have identified 248 different themes, which were connected to the coverage of Chinese investment, and 141 themes raised in discussions of China and 5G.

A vast majority of texts discussing Chinese involvement in the 5G networks naturally focused on the two main Chinese suppliers of the technology – Huawei and

IMAGE 5: REPRESENTATION OF KEY TOPICS CONNECTED TO 5G ISSUE AND CHINA IN ANALYZED SLOVAK MEDIA OUTLETS (7/2017–2020)



ZTE. This topic was raised in 85 percent of all articles. Among the remaining topics making the top 10 list, articles focused on Chinese espionage (36 percent), national security (25 percent), US-China conflict (25 percent), cybersecurity (17 percent), Chinese Communist Party and its regime (15 percent), trade war (12 percent), Huawei's and ZTE's competitors – Nokia, Ericsson, and Samsung (12 percent), critical infrastructure (8 percent), and human rights (8 percent).

Rather unsurprisingly, articles that included the above-mentioned themes carried a slightly negative sentiment. The only exception to this were articles that raised the issue of the trade war, which tended to cover Chinese involvement in 5G development slightly positively. Besides trade war, only a handful of other topics, which were marginally covered at best, received a positive evaluation in the articles. On the other end, the most negative articles were those, which included topics of human rights, the Chinese regime, or critical infrastructure.

As for Chinese investment, the most frequent topic covered by the media was Chinese investment in Slovakia, or the lack of it. Some 38 percent of articles focused on this topic. The second most frequent topic was Chinese investment in the EU (32 percent), followed by infrastructure (26 percent). The top 10 most frequent topics also included Chinese investment in Czechia (25 percent), technology (21 percent), the auto industry (21 percent), mergers and acquisitions (18 percent), BRI (16 percent), security (16 percent), and Eastern Slovakia (15 percent). Similar to 5G, most of the top ten themes carried a negative sentiment.

Articles on Chinese investment in Slovakia were, on average, neutral with a marginal leaning towards the positive side of the spectrum. Once the articles focused on the Eastern part of Slovakia, the coverage became more positive, as prospects of new investment in the investment-starved region were particularly welcome. A similar trend could be observed in articles focusing on the automotive industry, as they dis-

IMAGE 6: REPRESENTATION OF KEY TOPICS CONNECTED TO CHINESE INVESTMENT IN ANALYZED SLOVAK MEDIA OUTLETS (7/2017–2020)



cussed prospects of attracting a new investor from China to Slovakia. Interestingly, in discussions of Chinese investment, articles on Chinese investment in Czechia were the most negative ones, which emulates the discourse present in Czech media, where negative coverage of investment prevails over positive coverage.

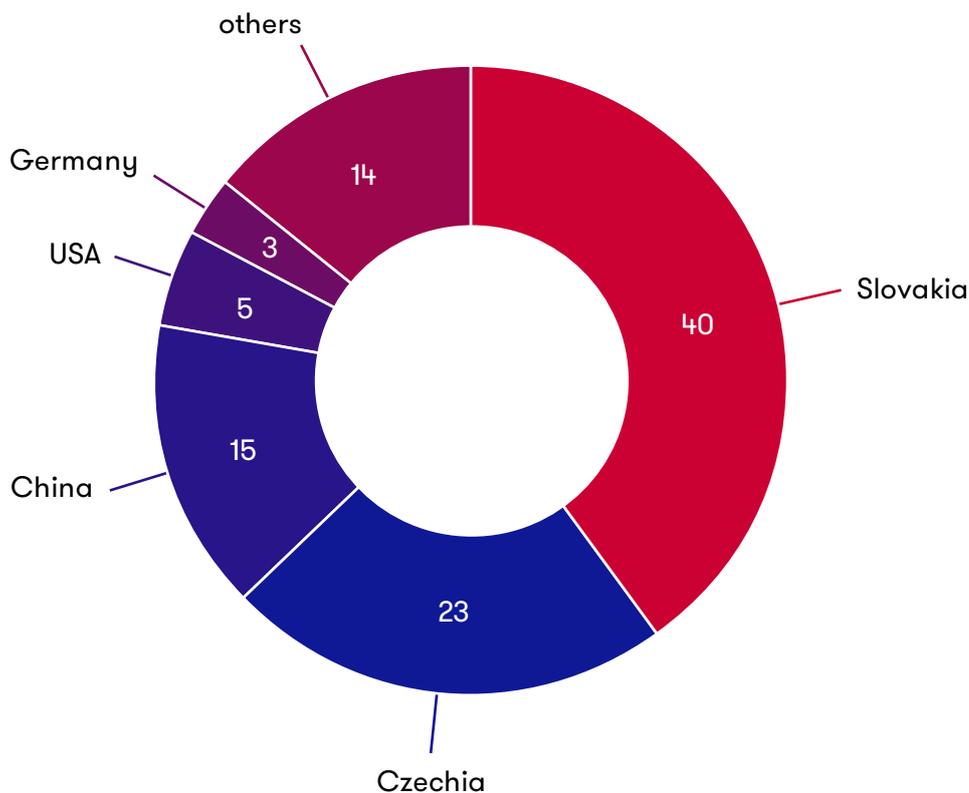
PRESS AGENCIES AND POLITICIANS DRIVE THE DISCOURSE

The question of who forms the media discourse on China in connection to the two analyzed issues is even more interesting than the question of how the discourse looks. Here, two types of data can offer insights – data on authorship and data on quoted persons (experts, politicians, etc.).

The first important observation relates to the authorship and co-authorship of the texts. It is obvious that in the Slovak discourse on China, press agencies play an important role. On Chinese investment, little over one-quarter of articles was merely taken over by the media from the various press agencies. On 5G, this share was even higher. Almost one-half of all the pieces discussing China and 5G originated with the press agencies. From among the press agencies, the media rely chiefly on TASR, the Slovak public press agency, followed by the local private agency SITA. Interestingly, the Czech press agency CTK was also present, although to a lesser extent.

The two local news agencies were the top two sources of texts on both researched topics, cumulatively responsible for 25 percent of all articles on investment and 37 percent of articles on 5G. This suggests that a significant portion of the coverage devoted to China can be characterized as day-to-day news, without providing much analytical insight into the topic.

GRAPH 16: PERCENTAGE OF AGENDA SETTERS (BY THE COUNTRY OF ORIGIN) IN TEXTS ON CHINESE INVESTMENT IN ANALYZED SLOVAK MEDIA OUTLETS (7/2017–2020)

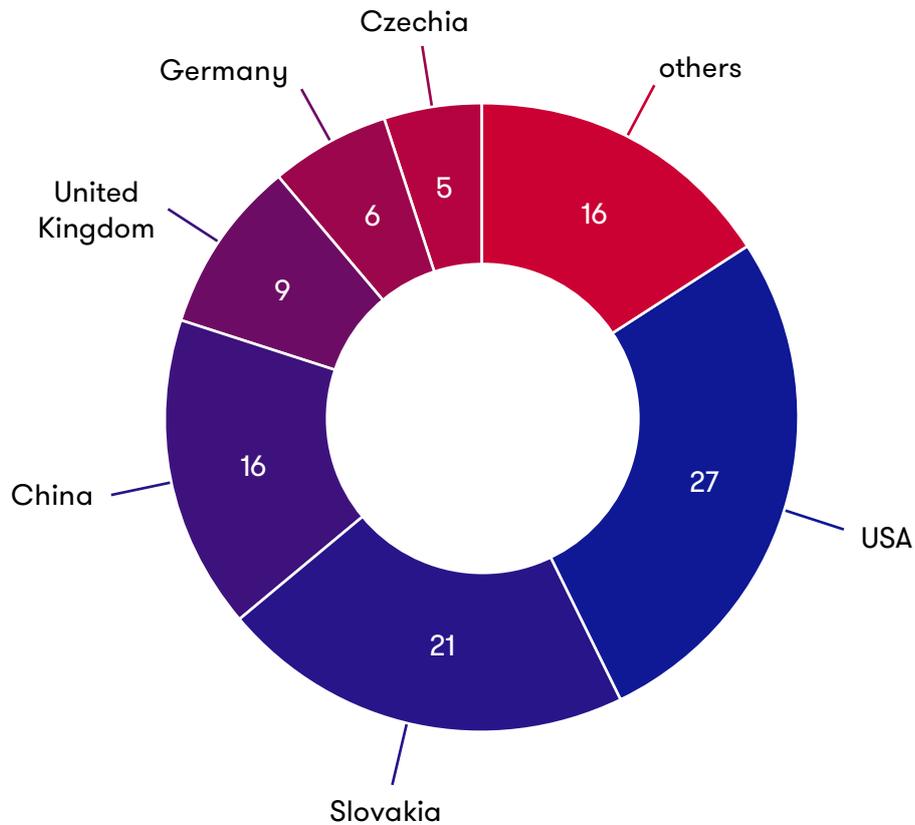


Slovak journalists cover these topics in a more systemic fashion only rarely. Besides the press agencies, only a few authors wrote five or more pieces – eleven authors on investment and six on 5G. In both cases, the most prolific writer has been Peter Schutz, a commentator from SME daily, who seems to be one of the most skeptically writing authors (over half of his articles carry a negative sentiment). Other frequently featured authors on China and 5G included Branislav Toma, Andrej Matisák, Matus Krčmárik, Ján Trangel, and Lukáš Onderčanin. As for investment, besides Schutz, frequently printed authors include Jindřich Šídlo, Marek Poracký, Matúš Krčmárik, Branislav Toma, Matej Šimalčík, Anna Šípošová, Iris Kopcsayová, Lukáš Onderčanin, Richard Turcsányi, and Tibor Macák. It is apparent that there is a significant overlap of authors covering the two topics.

Whom the articles cite is an equally interesting question as who writes them, if not more so. In both cases, the research showed that the discourse of Slovak media on Chinese investment and 5G is formed predominantly by non-Slovak actors. Slovak actors feature in the articles to a small extent, the involvement of Slovak politicians is marginal.

Altogether, we have identified 359 people who were in some capacity quoted in articles dealing with Chinese investment. Of these, only 32 percent were quoted on five or more occasions. Slovaks represented 40 percent of quoted persons. The remainder of those quoted by the media were of foreign origin, chiefly from the Czech Republic (23 percent), China (15 percent), the USA (5 percent), and Germany (3 percent).

GRAPH 17: PERCENTAGE OF AGENDA SETTERS (BY THE COUNTRY OF ORIGIN) IN TEXTS ON 5G ISSUE IN CONNECTION TO CHINA IN ANALYZED SLOVAK MEDIA OUTLETS (7/2017-2020)



On the topic of China and 5G, 275 people were quoted in texts on China and 5G, from which 29 percent were quoted on five or more occasions. The problem with the lack of Slovak voices features more prominently on the topic of 5G. Slovaks accounted only for 21 percent of citations. Slovak voices on China and 5G did not even achieve the highest share in the discourse, as US agenda setters provided 27 percent of quotes. Besides Slovaks and Americans, voices from China (16 percent), United Kingdom (9 percent), Germany (6 percent), and Czech Republic (5 percent) featured prominently.

The low presence of Slovak voices in China-related topics, especially on 5G – a crucial topic from both security and economic viewpoints – points to a larger problem. Slovakia is facing a prolonged problem with brain drain, which naturally impacts also the field of China watching. As a result, Slovakia lacks enough domestic expertise to be able to develop both a domestic discourse on China as well as a substantial public discussion on challenges posed by China and Slovak response to them. Think tanks have repeatedly pointed out this problem, nevertheless, a solution is not in sight just yet.

Interestingly, there is a staggering difference between the two topics on the extent to which the discourse is shaped by politicians. In both cases politicians, though not Slovak ones, were the number one quoted persons. Among those, who were quoted five or more times, politicians were responsible for 65 percent of quotes on Chinese investment. The most quoted politician was Czech President Milos Zeman, followed

by the Chinese President Xi Jinping. Slovak politician and former Prime Minister Peter Pellegrini ranked third. In the overall dataset, only five Slovak politicians featured among those quoted on five or more occasions. Of these five, four were from the SMER-SD political party (Peter Pellegrini, Robert Fico, Peter Žiga, and Richard Raši), highlighting the attention the SMER-SD party paid to attract Chinese investment to Slovakia in their overall approach to China.⁵³

As many as 81 percent of quotes on 5G came from politicians. The most quoted person was the US President Donald Trump, followed by the former US State Secretary Mike Pompeo, and, again, Xi Jinping. The most quoted Slovak politician on 5G was Peter Pellegrini, though this time ranking on a shared 8th place with the Czech Prime Minister Andrej Babiš and French President Emmanuel Macron. In the dataset composed of 5G-themed texts, only three Slovak politicians with more than five quotes were identified (Peter Pellegrini, Slovak President Zuzana Čaputová, and Minister of Foreign Affairs Ivan Korčok).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The scope of the coverage of the two China-related topics tends to reflect the overall changes in Slovak approach to China and the evolving understanding of opportunities and associated security risks posed by China. Slovakia's interest in China, especially after the global financial crisis, could be characterized as that of a 'pragmatic rent seeker' that focused on attracting new investment from China. Yet, the period which we examined has been reflecting the overall sobering up from Chinese promises. In terms of media coverage, this has translated to a decreasing interest in the topic of Chinese investment, as well as the increasingly negative sentiment with which the media reported on it.

At the same time, Slovak policymakers were becoming not only more skeptical of Chinese economic promises, but also increasingly wary of potential security risks, echoing the broader EU debates on China. This trend in Slovak policy-making has also been reflected in the media, as they started to increasingly cover security-related topics like Chinese involvement in the 5G buildup. Furthermore, the narrative on China and 5G has turned in mere three years from slightly positive to a somewhat negative one.

Despite these developments, it would be an exaggeration to claim that Slovakia has a developed, complex public debate on China. The opposite is true, as a significant portion of media coverage is formed by re-prints of reports prepared by press agencies.

Even though the discourse is formed mostly by politicians, a large portion of them is of foreign origin, chiefly from the US, China, and the Czech Republic. Slovak politicians do not feature prominently. Among politicians with five or more quotes, only three were identified in the dataset of texts on 5G, and five in the dataset on investment. To make China a topic of domestic public debate, Slovak politicians ought to publicly engage more with the various challenges posed by China.

At the same time, as China is emerging to be one of the most important foreign-policy issues through the EU, politicians ought to avoid unnecessary politicization and populist framing of the China-focused discourse. The formation of an effective

foreign, security, and economic policy on China requires a fact-based discourse motivated by national interests.

The media analysis has shown a lack of local elites with specific knowledge on China and related issues. Slovakia needs to promote the development of a domestic China-watching community, which is an important factor in developing a public discussion on what are Slovak interests vis-à-vis China and how to approach the various challenges posed by China.

Hungary: Maintaining a low profile

Tamás Matura

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The Hungarian government has developed political links to Beijing over the past decade which are among the strongest ones in the CEE region. One of the main goals of the Opening to the East Policy of Hungary has been the attraction of as much Chinese investment as possible. Despite all efforts, however, the level of FDI coming from China is still below expectations, which has had a negative impact on the media coverage of the topic as well. Meanwhile the issue of China's 5G technology and the role of Huawei has received even less attention, as the domestic discourse has barely gone beyond the translation of articles published by international news agencies. As the following chapter presents, the discourse is divided, as pro-government outlets mostly focus on the successes of bilateral relations, while independent sources and outlets close to the opposition share more negative news about Sino-Hungarian relations and China itself.

THE HUNGARIAN MEDIA LANDSCAPE

The Hungarian research on media coverage of 5G in connection of China and Chinese investment covered the period between July 2017 and December 2020. Based on the Newton media database fifteen media outlets with a significant impact on public discourse were selected: four printed dailies (Magyar Nemzet, Magyar Idők, Kisalföld and Népszava), four TV stations (RTL Klub, MTV, HírTV and TV2), one radio station (Kossuth Radio), and six online news portals (index.hu, origo.hu, hvg.hu, 444.hu, 24.hu, and hirado.hu). In cooperation with the Newton media clipping agency, 241 texts on the issue of Chinese investment and 152 texts on China's involvement in 5G networks were selected and coded. It has to be emphasized that these texts represent an overall media landscape in Hungary, however, do not necessarily cover all media outputs published on the matters in question. Thus, the dataset which was subjected to the analysis has to be understood as a representative, but not exhaustive sample of media coverage of the issues in Hungary.

The ownership of media outlets in Hungary is highly concentrated. According to international reports, the pro-government investors have transferred 467 media outlets to the Central European Press and Media Foundation (KESMA), including Magyar Nemzet, Magyar Idők,⁵⁴ Kisalföld and origo.hu, to control the flow of information in a way that pleases the current Hungarian government.⁵⁵ Consequently, the media sources covered by the analysis could be divided into two groups: pro-government media and independent/government-critical media. Besides Magyar Nemzet, Kisalföld,

Magyar Idők and origo.hu, channels of the national broadcaster (hirado.hu, MTV, and Kossuth Radio), HírTV and TV2 belong to the former group, while index.hu⁵⁶, hvg.hu, 444.hu, 24.hu, RTL Klub television, and Népszava daily belong to the latter.

As the first phase of MapInfluenCE has proven, media discourse in Hungary has never been in China's favor. In the period between 2010 and first half of 2017, it was mostly one-dimensional, focusing overwhelmingly on economic data and the development of bilateral ties in the past decade. At the same time, it was strongly politicized and influenced by the political attitude of the given media source towards the Hungarian government. Coverage was mostly materialistic and focused mainly on economics and financial opportunities and risks, while topics such as political values, human rights, minorities, or democracy in China received much less attention in the discourse. The overall coverage on China was mostly neutral (84 percent of texts between 2010-2017), due to the extremely high proportion of news focusing on the economy and trade statistics. However, when it comes to outputs dealing with political issues, the picture looked very different. There were three times more negative texts focusing on values and political issues than positive ones in the analyzed period. Furthermore, the proportion of negative texts (indicating the polarity of discourse on China) constantly increased between 2010 and 2017. Negative coverage made up 6 percent and positive news 5 percent of all articles in 2010. By 2017, the share of negative texts rose to 15 percent, against 5 percent of positive ones. Another important finding of our previous research was that the way China was portrayed by different media outlets was affected by domestic political divisions. Media sources considered close to the government published significantly more positive content about China, while those linked to the opposition published more negative than positive content.⁵⁷

Our current research confirms that the main features of the Hungarian media discourse on China have not changed in the years since mid-2017. Media outlets close to the government are still more positive about China than opposition and independent media. However, it is important to note that pro-government media seldom praise China itself. Instead, they commend the successes of Hungarian foreign policy in forging closer relations with China and emphasize the importance of bilateral economic and political ties. Consequently, the audience of these media sources may develop positive positions regarding China as the ties with China are portrayed as good for Hungary. On the contrary, it is equally logical to argue that those who are informed mostly by media sources critical towards the policies of the government, are more prone to develop negative perceptions of China.

INVESTMENT NEWS: DRIVEN BY POLITICAL EVENTS

The media coverage on Chinese investment in Hungary does not follow a clear trend line, as media outlets seem to be generally uninterested in the topic, except for three spikes in November 2017, November 2018 and April 2019. The low number of articles may be explained by the fact that Hungary did not receive any tangible major Chinese investment in the analyzed period.⁵⁸ Meanwhile, the three spikes are connected to major diplomatic events: the Budapest summit of the 16+1 took place in November 2017, the China International Import Expo in Shanghai, and the China-

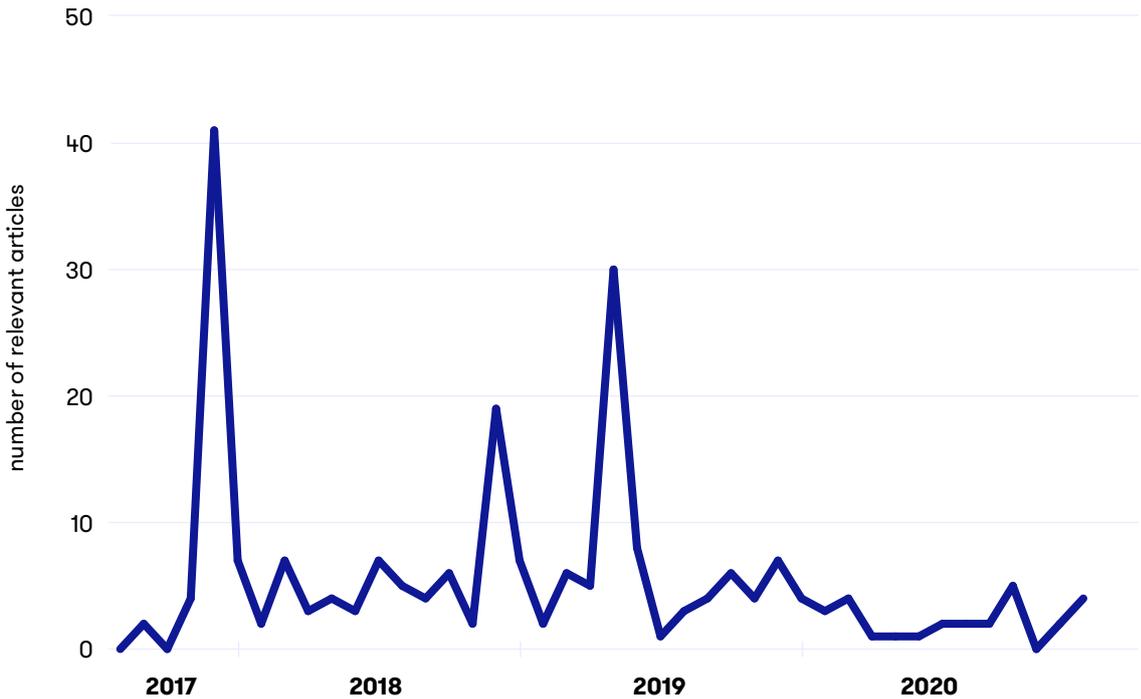
CEEC Central Bank Governors' Meeting in Budapest both took place in November 2018, while April 2019 marked the second Belt and Road Forum in Beijing and the visit of the president of the Sino-CEE Fund in Budapest.

These spikes also shed light on a special feature of the pro-government media in Hungary, as they covered the same stories in multiple articles thus inflating the total number of texts. For instance, Magyar Idők daily published seven separate articles (out of which three were published within ten minutes) on November 27, 2017 alone on every speech and detail of the 16+1 summit. Altogether Magyar Idők published sixteen articles on the summit in five days. When it comes to the second spike in November 2018, it was the pro-government channel TV2 to cover the CIIE six times in three days, and the Central Bank Governors' Meeting three times in two days. Meanwhile, media outlets considered to be independent from the government barely covered these events at all. The pattern seems to be similar in the period of the third spike, as out of the eleven articles on the Belt and Road Forum eight were published by pro-government outlets, just like all five articles about the meeting of the Minister of Finance with the president of the Sino-CEE Fund.

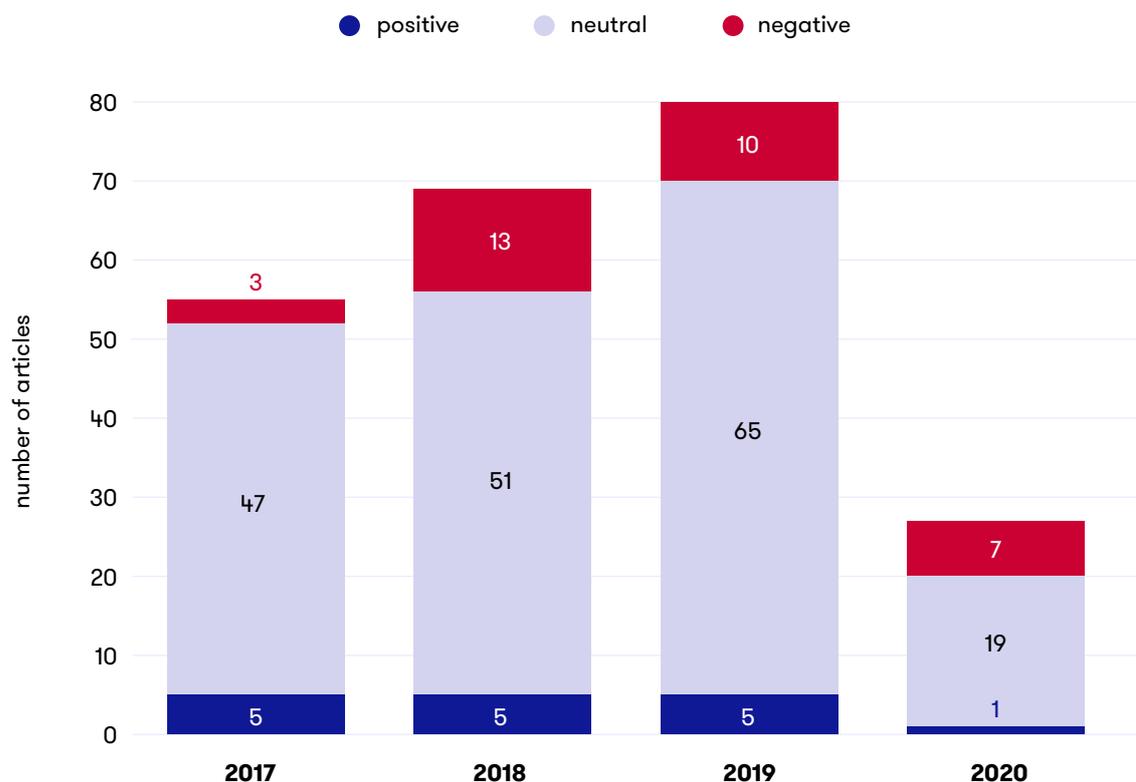
In sum, Hungarian media coverage on issues related to Chinese investment is mostly driven by diplomatic occasions and by the pro-government media which proactively inflates the number of articles that cover the international activities of Hungarian government officials.

Like during the six and half years covered by our previous research,⁵⁹ in the following period, the Hungarian media coverage was mostly neutral about both topics of concern, though the division line between pro-government and independent media is once again clear and obvious. Over three-quarter of news coverage was neutral about China's investment, 14 percent negative and 10 percent positive.

GRAPH 18: EVOLUTION OF COVERAGE OF CHINESE INVESTMENT IN ANALYZED HUNGARIAN MEDIA OUTLETS (7/2017-2020)



GRAPH 19: SENTIMENT OF TEXTS ON CHINESE INVESTMENT IN ANALYZED HUNGARIAN MEDIA OUTLETS (7/2017–2020) – OVERALL DATA



Media outlets with the highest numbers and share of negative coverage on China’s investment all belong to the group of independent outlets, while sources that shared articles with positive tones are all close to the government.⁶⁰ Even though some of the pro-government media outlets have published some negative texts as well, those focused on the impact of China’s investment in third countries and not on the role it plays in Hungary. As it has been mentioned before, the pro-government media feel inclined to praise bilateral relations and the successes of the China related policies of the Hungarian government, but not China itself. Consequently, even pro-government media published some critical articles about China, mostly based on international concerns. This might be explained by the dubious image of China among the supporters of the government. According to the results of a recent public opinion survey pro-government voters are heavily overrepresented within the pro-China group.⁶¹ However, the elite of the governing party nonetheless nurtures a realistic view about China.⁶² Cognitive tension between the pro-China narrative of the government and the deeply rooted personal suspicions of journalists could easily lead to the scenario where bilateral relations are depicted positively, while China itself is perceived negatively.

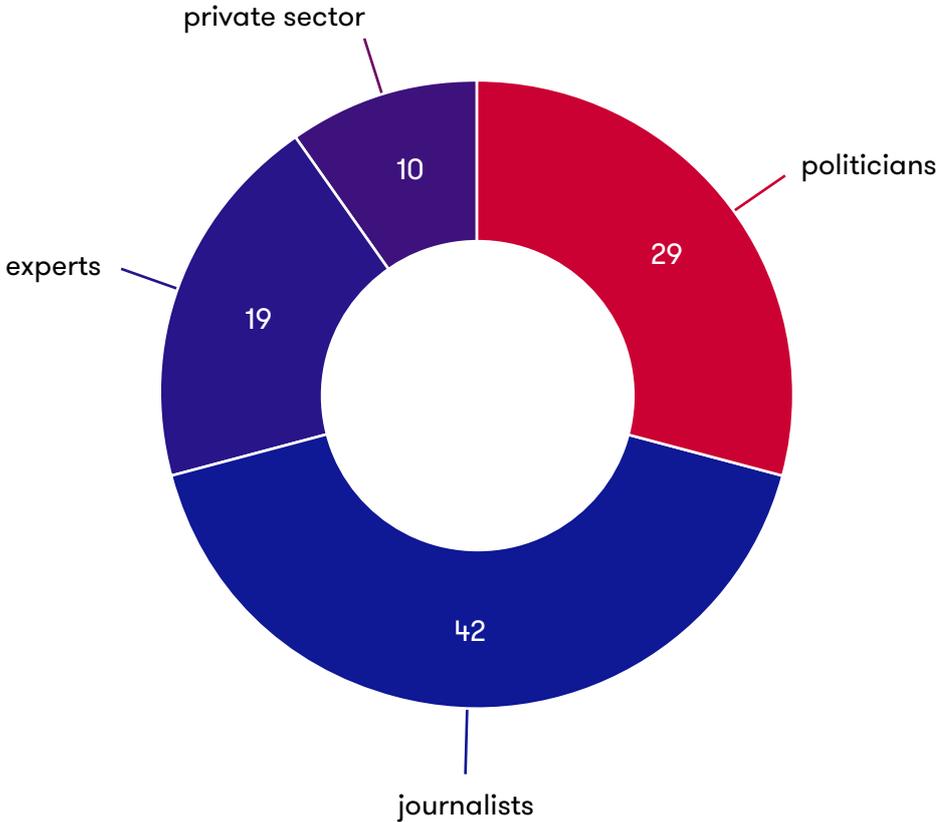
Unlike the discourse in Slovakia, Hungarian media tend to focus on Hungary in connection to both analyzed issues. We have identified 101 topics connected to the coverage of Chinese investment, and 49 themes revolved around the issue of 5G development. For practical reasons only the themes which appeared with a higher frequency were visualized.

IMAGE 7: REPRESENTATION OF KEY TOPICS CONNECTED TO CHINESE INVESTMENT IN ANALYZED HUNGARIAN MEDIA OUTLETS (7/2017–2020)



When it comes to investment relations, it was mostly major diplomatic events that have shaped the narrative. Chinese investment in Hungary was mentioned mostly in media coverage on China-CEE summits and Belt and Road Forums. Naturally, the renovation of the Budapest-Belgrade railway connection was the most frequently mentioned specific project, as the story has been developing for many years. The extensive coverage on property investment is a unique feature of the Hungarian discourse, in comparison to media discourses on Chinese investment in other V4 countries. Thanks to the golden visa program of the Hungarian government, over 15,000 Chinese immi-

GRAPH 20: PERCENTAGE OF AGENDA SETTERS (BY OCCUPATION) IN TEXTS ON CHINESE INVESTMENT IN ANALYZED HUNGARIAN MEDIA OUTLETS (7/2017–2020)



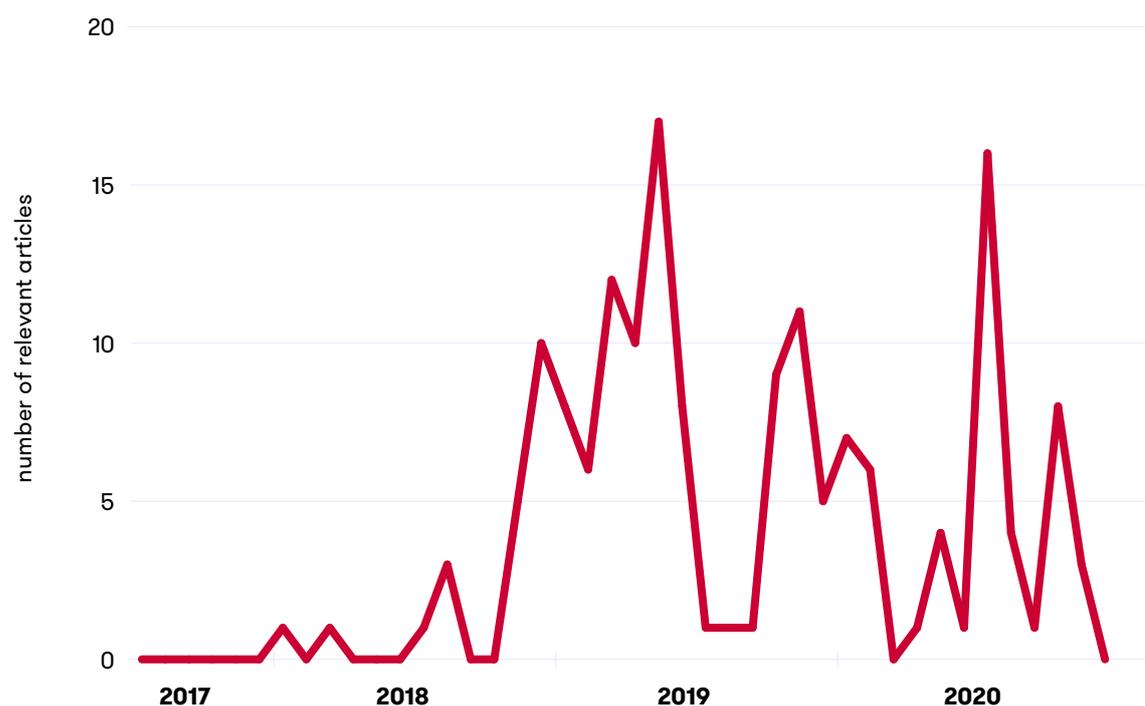
grants arrived in Hungary between 2013 and 2017. Even though most do not actually live in the country, thousands of them have bought apartments in Budapest, which may have contributed to the property price boom of the time. Consequently, the role they play on the property market has become a major topic ever since.

Just like in other V4 countries, the main drivers of the discourse were journalists and politicians, not experts. When it comes to the topic of Chinese investment in Hungary, a handful of politicians played a pivotal role in shaping the narrative. Péter Sziijártó, the Hungarian Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade, alone represented 44 percent of quotes made by politicians, while the Prime Minister and Minister of Finance's share of quotes were 25 and 9 percent, respectively. The fourth in the ranking was László Kövér, Speaker of the Parliament, with a mere 2 percent share. Meanwhile, the list of authors is more fragmented, as the share of the most prolific journalist is below 15 percent, and 29 other correspondents have contributed to the discourse. There were four journalists (Tamás Mészáros, Bence Horváth, Attila Mártonffy and Viktor Buzna) with five or more articles about Chinese investment, while others had one or two articles on the matter.

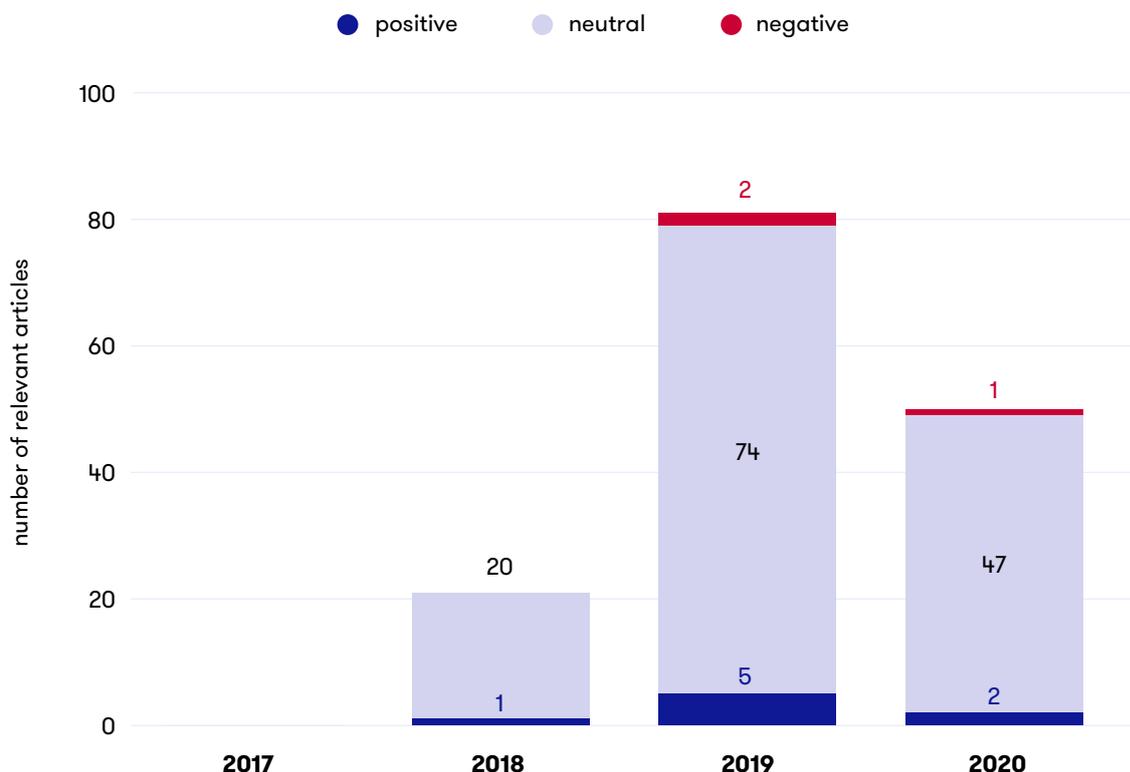
5G: AN ORPHANED TOPIC

When it comes to the issue of China's involvement in the development of 5G networks, the pattern of coverage in Hungary looks similar to Slovak and Polish results. There were three longer peak periods, with the first one between late 2018 and mid-2019, the second from late 2019 to early 2020 and the last one in the second half

GRAPH 21: EVOLUTION OF COVERAGE OF 5G ISSUE IN CONNECTION TO CHINA IN ANALYZED HUNGARIAN MEDIA OUTLETS (7/2017–2020)



GRAPH 22: SENTIMENT OF TEXTS ON 5G ISSUE IN CONNECTION TO CHINA IN ANALYZED HUNGARIAN MEDIA OUTLETS (7/2017–2020) – OVERALL DATA



of 2020. The first wave of 5G-related articles was unleashed by the arrest of Huawei CFO Meng Wanzhou in Canada and the first strikes against Huawei by US President Donald Trump, followed by the reactions of the EU and the UK. The second peak in late 2019 was reached when Péter Szijjártó, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade, announced that Huawei would cooperate with Hungary in building the country's 5G network. Huawei-related public communications of other EU countries kept the wave riding till early 2020, followed by a short decline in coverage right before the third (double) spike in the second half of 2020. The media covered extensively the UK's decision to exclude Huawei in July, while a similar move by Sweden and the opening of Huawei's R&D centre in Budapest were dominating China-related news in October 2020.

Unlike in the case of investment-related issues, spikes in the coverage of China's involvement in the development of 5G networks are not dominated in the pro-government media. All media outlets seem to be equally interested in the topic, although the number of articles published by independent media increased over time (8, 46 and 42 articles in 2018, 2019 and 2020, respectively), while pro-government outlets decreased their coverage of the topic from 2019 to 2020 significantly (13, 35 and 8 articles in 2018, 2019, and 2020, respectively). One can only speculate that following the embracement of Huawei by the Hungarian authorities, pro-government media felt less inclined to share controversial news about the Chinese telecom giant, while critical media kept pushing the topic.

Like in other countries in Central Europe, we can observe a relative decline in the number of articles discussing Chinese investment and 5G-related issues in 2020 compared to the previous year. This may be explained by the coronavirus pandemic as public attention has turned towards the virus, and all diplomatic events that could have attracted media coverage were cancelled. It is noteworthy that the issue of Chinese investment was more divisive than the topic of Chinese 5G-related activities, as in the case of the latter one 93 percent of the coverage was neutral, 2 percent negative and 5 percent positive. The highly neutral discourse on the 5G technology might be explained by the technical nature of the topic. Most articles have mentioned US concerns, but offered a balanced view of the issue, presenting the counterarguments of the Hungarian government and Huawei as well.

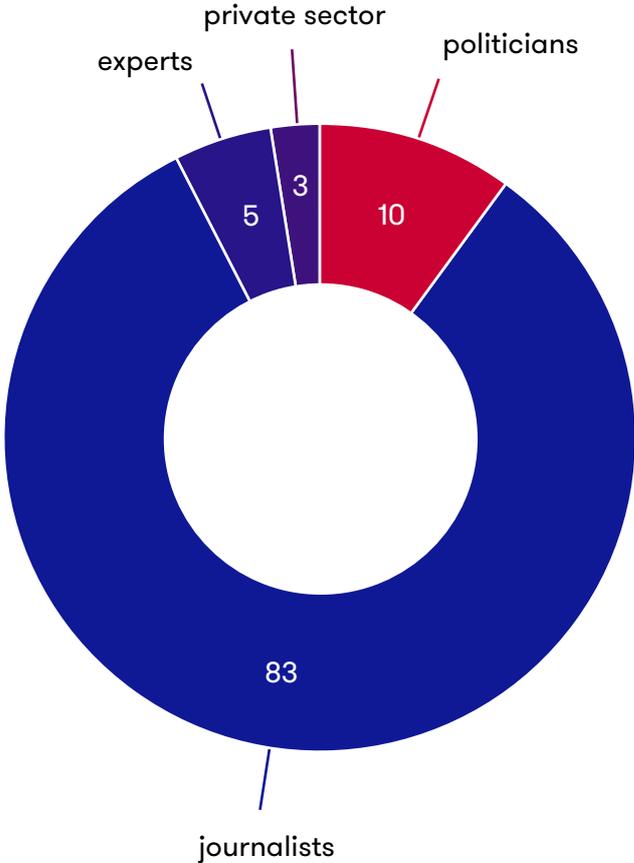
IMAGE 8: REPRESENTATION OF KEY TOPICS CONNECTED TO CHINESE 5G TECHNOLOGY IN ANALYZED HUNGARIAN MEDIA OUTLETS (7/2017–2020)



Hungarian media discourse on China's involvement in the development of 5G networks was mostly driven by international events, while domestic factors were missing from the debate. Articles revolved around Donald Trump's comments on and sanctions against Huawei, and the subsequent reactions of the EU and its members like the UK and Sweden. Since the Hungarian government has expressed its unquestionable intention to include Huawei into the development of the 5G network of the country at an early stage of the international debate,⁶³ there was no more room left for a substantial domestic debate. Consequently, the media simply reported on the international developments of the 5G issue, and the debates in Western countries.

The theme of Chinese 5G systems was dominated by journalists to an incredibly high share, that is, many of the articles covering the topic did not quote any politicians, experts, or representatives of the private sector. Instead, media outlets mostly relied on foreign sources like Western news agencies and translated their articles. Given that domestic discourse was always shallow on the matter, journalists had no other option but to cover foreign news related to the development of the 5G issue.

GRAPH 23: PERCENTAGE OF AGENDA SETTERS (BY OCCUPATION) IN TEXTS ON 5G ISSUE IN ANALYZED HUNGARIAN MEDIA OUTLETS (7/2017–2020)



There were only three journalists with more than five articles (Zsuzsanna Dömös, Viktor Buzna and Bence Horváth). The only politician to contribute to the discourse to a significant level was Péter Szijjártó, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade, as he was responsible for 75 percent of all comments made by politicians. Meanwhile, the role of experts and private sector representatives was negligible. Once again, this might be explained by the lack of a vivid domestic debate in Hungary, and by the lack of strong supporting or protesting arguments in the public discourse. When the Sinophone Borderlands public opinion survey raised the question whether Hungary should work together with China in the buildup of the 5G mobile infrastructure, 34 percent of respondents were undecided, while 36 percent somewhat or strongly agreed and 29 percent somewhat or strongly disagreed.⁶⁴ Results suggest that most Hungarians are uncertain (or do not care) about China’s involvement in the country’s 5G network and media outlets do not attempt to influence the public in either direction.

Conclusion and recommendations

As our previous research presented, despite all the deep divisions in the Hungarian political arena, Sino-Hungarian relations enjoyed a privileged position, since none of the parties in the Parliament questioned the importance of China publicly and politically sensitive issues were not on the agenda in the analyzed period.⁶⁵ It is probably a remarkably Hungarian speciality in the region that prominent politicians of the opposition parties barely mentioned China at all in their public statements, and unlike in some other countries, increased Chinese presence did not trigger any alarm in Hungarian political circles or among the wider public.⁶⁶

Since the only major Chinese project in Hungary is the renovation of the Budapest-Belgrade railway line, domestic discourse on Chinese investment was limited in the analyzed period, and periodic spikes in coverage were mostly triggered by diplomatic events featuring Hungarian government politicians. Following years of unfulfilled promises, fatigue about Chinese investment may have reached media outlets as well. As to the issue of the building of 5G networks, the media discourse is even less based on domestic developments.

In sum, the discourse still focuses mostly on materialistic considerations, while values or political issues are less relevant to the Hungarian media. Given that the wider public seemingly does not care or is not informed enough about what is at stake, this approach is unlikely to change in the near future, unless the general election of 2022 brings fundamental changes to the political life of the country. Though their victory is unlikely, the current opposition would probably develop a China policy in stark contrast with the approach of the current government. The China policy of the new German government will be another important factor that may influence the position of the Hungarian government. If Berlin continues its policies developed under the terms of Angela Merkel, the Orbán government may feel encouraged to stick to its own China policy as well.

Whatever the results of the election will be, China will remain an important factor in the foreign policy of Hungary, thus it would be desirable to create a more nuanced media and public discourse on issues like the question of Chinese investment and the future of 5G technology. As the importance of both issues is on the rise in Washington and Brussels, Hungary should prepare itself for heated debates. One of the most important steps should be the disclosure of official information about Chinese investment in the country to increase transparency on the matter.

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About MapInfluenCE

The publication was prepared within the MapInfluenCE (previously known as ChinfluenCE) project, which maps Russia and China's influence in Central Europe, specifically Czechia, Poland, Hungary and Slovakia.

The internationally acclaimed project has utilized various tools such as media analysis to uncover who shapes China discourse in the Visegrád countries and why, the mapping of agenda-setters to reveal links between pro-China businessmen and local political elites, an analysis of changes in political parties' positions on China in the Czech and Hungarian Parliaments during the past 30 years, etc.

Through a variety of outputs (media articles, interviews, research reports, open as well as closed door events and briefings of stakeholders), MapInfluenCE broadens and shapes expert as well as public debates on China's influence and activities in the region of Central Europe. MapInfluenCE findings were widely quoted in European, US and Australian press, mentioned in e.g. the US-China Economic and Security Review Commission's 2018 Annual Report or the Reporters without Borders' report on the vulnerability of media, and presented at the European Parliament or to a delegation of US Congressmen and Senators. The original approach of MapInfluenCE set the tone and inspired journalists, think tankers and NGOs both within and outside of the region, who later conducted similar analyses on the media image of China and agenda-setting, drawing on the project's methodology and techniques.

The international team has published more than 20 policy and briefing papers in five different languages (English, Czech, Polish, Hungarian, and Slovak), authored articles or were quoted in numerous local as well as international media including Financial Times, Wall Street Journal, China Digital Times, Sydney Morning Herald, Politico Brussels Influence, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, Diplomat, Neue Zürcher Zeitung, Le Temps, Radio Free Europe, etc.

MapInfluenCE is designed and run by the Association for International Affairs (AMO), a Prague-based foreign policy think tank and NGO.

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Association for International Affairs is a non-governmental non-profit organization founded in 1997. The mission of AMO has been to contribute to a deeper understanding of international affairs through a broad range of educational and research activities. Thanks to its activities in the Czech Republic and abroad and 20-year tradition, AMO has established itself as the Czech leading independent institution in the field of international relations and foreign policy.

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Footnotes

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- 54 One of the oldest daily newspapers in Hungary Magyar Nemzet was owned by one of the oligarchs, Lajos Simicska, who was the oldest ally of PM Viktor Orbán, thus the paper was the mouthpiece of the government until 2014. However, Orbán started a fight against Simicska, therefore Magyar Nemzet turned against the government in mid-2014 until its shut-down after the election victory of Orbán in early 2018. Journalists loyal to Orbán left Magyar Nemzet and established Magyar Idők, a pro-government daily in 2015. Following Simicska's defeat and the closure of the original Magyar Nemzet, the company behind Magyar Idők acquired the brand of Magyar Nemzet and restarted its publication with the staff of Magyar Idők which, in turn, was closed. In sum, Magyar Nemzet was a pro-government daily before 2014, anti-government between 2014 and 2018, and once again pro-government since early 2019.
- 55 “Conclusions of the Joint International Press Freedom Mission to Hungary”, *International Press Institute*, December 3, 2019, <https://ipi.media/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Hungary-Conclusions-International-Mission-Final.pdf>.
- 56 Index.hu is the most popular online news portal of Hungary. It used to be critical towards the government until mid-2020 when its editor-in-chief was fired and consequently the whole editorial staff left the company. Following these events, the company hired new journalists from other, mostly pro-government media outlets.

- 57 Ivana Karásková, Tamás Matura, Richard Q. Turcsányi and Matej Šimalčík. Central Europe for Sale: The Politics of Chinese Influence. Policy paper 3/2018, Prague: Association for International Affairs (AMO), 2018, https://www.amo.cz/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/AMO_central-europe-for-sale-the-politics-of-chinese-influence.pdf.
- 58 See Chinese Investment in Central and Eastern Europe, <https://www.china-cee-investment.org/>. The government has announced the arrival of some new Chinese investors in 2020 though.
- 59 Ivana Karásková, Tamás Matura, Richard Q. Turcsányi and Matej Šimalčík. Central Europe for Sale: The Politics of Chinese Influence. Policy paper 3/2018, Prague: Association for International Affairs (AMO), 2018, https://www.amo.cz/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/AMO_central-europe-for-sale-the-politics-of-chinese-influence.pdf.
- 60 Please note the special case of index.hu which was acquired by pro-government players in 2020.
- 61 Richard Q. Turcsányi, Matej Šimalčík, Kristína Kironská, Renáta Sedláková et al. European public opinion on China in the age of COVID-19. Bratislava: CEIAS, 2020, <https://sinofon.cz/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/COMP-poll-final.pdf>.
- 62 Matej Šimalčík et al. Perception of China among V4 Political Elites. Bratislava: CEIAS, 2019, <https://ceias.eu/perception-of-china-among-v4-political-elites/>.
- 63 “Hungarian minister opens door to Huawei for 5G network rollout”, Reuters, November 5, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-hungary-telecoms-huawei-idUSKBN1XF12U>.
- 64 Richard Q. Turcsányi, Matej Šimalčík, Kristína Kironská, Renáta Sedláková et al. European public opinion on China in the age of COVID-19. Bratislava: CEIAS, 2020, <https://sinofon.cz/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/COMP-poll-final.pdf>.
- 65 However, public and political discourse on China has become heated in 2021, as the purchase of Chinese vaccines and the issue of the proposed campus of Fudan University in Budapest triggered a vivid debate.
- 66 Ivana Karásková, Tamás Matura, Richard Q. Turcsányi and Matej Šimalčík. Central Europe for Sale: The Politics of Chinese Influence. Policy paper 3/2018, Prague: Association for International Affairs (AMO), 2018, https://www.amo.cz/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/AMO_central-europe-for-sale-the-politics-of-chinese-influence.pdf.

