



# Under the radar

Mapping the Czech and Slovak  
local governments' ties to China

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Central Europe and the Baltic States

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# Summary

- Even though paradiplomatic relations with China have been largely passing under the radar (with a few exceptions), the interactions of Czech and Slovak sub-national units have been on the rise in the past decade, since the establishment of the 16+1 platform.<sup>i</sup>
- By mapping paradiplomatic relations of 126 sub-national entities in Slovakia and 241 sub-national entities in Czechia (regions, cities, and city districts), we have identified that at least 32 sub-national entities in the Czechia and 14 entities in Slovakia have had some kind of agreement-based cooperation with Chinese partners.
- Paradiplomatic relations both with China suffer from inconsistent transparency levels, which reduces the ability to exercise public control over these relations, and as a result, contributes towards a culture of non-accountability.
- In the spirit of local self-governance, Slovak and Czech sub-national actors engage in international relations within loose legal frameworks, allowing them to act independently from the national foreign policy.
- Chinese sub-national actors have significant leeway in pursuing local interests independently of China's central government. At the same time, they are required to be supportive of larger foreign

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<sup>i</sup> The 16+1 platform is an informal name of a mechanism of cooperation between China and the countries of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) which was established in 2012. Between 2019 and 2021, it was known as 17+1 due to the accession of Greece, however it reverted to 16+1 with the decision of Lithuania to stop its participation in 2021. For the sake of clarity, this paper uses the term '16+1 platform' when referring to this initiative.

policy goals. Existing regulations, as well as the practice of Chinese sub-national diplomacy, show that on sensitive issues such as the One China Policy, local entities submit to broader Chinese foreign policy goals.

- Activities of sub-national Chinese actors are supervised by the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries (CPAFFC), a nominally independent friendship organization with links to the party-state. Local relations are seen in China as a form of public diplomacy that can help achieve foreign policy goals via nonpolitical channels. CPAFFC regulations directly stipulate the requirement for Chinese entities to demand adherence to the One China Principle from their international partners.
- Czech and Slovak regions have mostly developed cooperation with Chinese partners with the expectation of economic deliverables for the region (e.g. investments), or in some cases for specific local companies. Apart from that, interest in cultural exchanges, cooperation in education, health (traditional Chinese medicine), and sport has driven cooperation.
- In Czechia, development in local relations went in step with the central government's restart of ties with Beijing. A majority of local partnerships were formed in the 2014-2017 period. Following the same logic, the worsening of bilateral relations on a governmental level was followed by a decrease of interest in cooperation and ultimately also the termination of six partnerships. As of 2021, no Czech entities expressed interest in establishing new cooperation with Chinese partners.
- Despite earliest relations going back to the early 1990s, Slovak sub-national entities started to express their interest in developing ties with China mostly after 2012 and peaked in 2016. Unlike in Czechia, new cooperation proposals with Chinese partners are being discussed as of 2021, despite increasingly critical policy on China on the governmental level.

- By entering into partnerships with Chinese counterparts, cities can use the relationship to promote local tourism. In the case of Slovak town Martin, partnering with Ningbo contributed towards a steady inflow of Chinese tourists before the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Local ties were an important avenue for reciprocal donations of PPE throughout the pandemic, especially in Czechia. A vast majority of donations have been done within the framework of existing cooperation.
- Some relations only appear to serve as a basis for “delegation tourism” and subsequent abuse of the partnership for the sake of obtaining Schengen visas for Chinese nationals. Czech towns around Prague received dozens of Chinese delegations which usually almost immediately left Czechia for other EU countries with no long-term cooperation results.
- Political affiliations of mayors and governors are an important factor in promoting ties with China. In cases of both Czechia and Slovakia, relationships were largely spearheaded by social democratic politicians from Czech Social Democratic Party (ČSSD) and Slovakia’s SMER-SD party. However, willingness for cooperation has not been limited to them.
- In some cases in Czechia, management of contacts with Chinese partners was effectively outsourced to private actors. The business-politics nexus that has spearheaded the government-level ties with China has also been an important factor in pushing for and mediating the establishment of ties on the local level. In Czechia, the activities of the Czech-China Chamber of Cooperation and the Czech-Slovak Chinese Chamber are most notable in this respect.
- Compared to Czechia, the business-political nexus has been less prolific in promoting paradiplomacy in Slovakia. Such activities are tied especially to businesses that often engaged with Chinese local authorities and promoted paradiplomatic links for the sake of promoting their own commercial interests. Košice

also outsourced management of its relations with Wuhan to a businessman with economic interests in China.

- Contentious political values have not played a significant role in Slovakia where paradiplomatic relations continued to develop even after the central government adopted a more critical, value-based policy on China.
- In contrast, local ties with Chinese partners have long been a controversial issue in Czechia, mostly due to objections to human rights abuses in China and subsequently also disillusionment about unrealized economic promises. This trend has been further strengthened after the worsening of Sino-Czech bilateral relations since 2018.
- An increasing number of Czech and Slovak municipalities and regions are participating in the Flag for Tibet event. In the case of Czechia, local governments have participated in the activity since the 1990s. Czech sub-national entities are one of the most active among the participating countries. In Slovakia, participation in the event has a much shorter history. In some cases, even local governments with relations with Chinese entities have participated in the Flag for Tibet.

# Recommendations

- Central governments should establish a consultation mechanism for local governments, which would enable them to consult on new paradiplomatic relations regarding their potential impact on national interests and national security. This would help to ensure that activities of the central government and local governments abroad do not clash.
- As part of the consultation mechanism, Czech and Slovak governments should develop (in dialogue with local governments) guidelines for paradiplomacy, which would aid the local governments in establishing feasible paradiplomatic ties that do not undermine the overall foreign and security policy of the state.
- Paradiplomacy guidelines should take into account specifics of authoritarian regimes in order to prevent potential abuses of the relationship that can result in undermining of democratic values.
- Before engaging with Chinese partners, local governments should conduct due diligence in order to gain an understanding of their future partners and their interests.
- To ensure the feasibility of the partnership, local governments should prepare cooperation plans which would ensure steady and constructive development of the partnership.
- Local governments need to improve the transparency of their paradiplomatic relations. Partnership agreements and other related documents should be published online. Annual reports summarizing the activities carried out under the partnerships' frameworks should be also available for the general public.



- Central governments should also take note of the ability of local governments to complement their capacity to negotiate on specific projects with China, especially on investment and their localization within the recipient country.

# 1. Introduction

When in late 2019 and early 2020 Prague's sister city relations with Beijing and Shanghai were broken off, and Prague concluded a similar agreement with the Taiwanese capital Taipei,<sup>1</sup> it became apparent that local governments on the regional and municipal level are playing a much more important role in the relations between the Central European countries and China than they are usually credited with.

Classifying and investigating these relations plays a crucial role in our understanding of China-Europe relations and the actors involved in them. With China becoming an increasingly salient topic of discussion in Czech and Slovak politics, we aim to zoom in on the increasing importance of paradiplomatic relations of municipal and regional administrations with their Chinese counterparts.

To provide a comprehensive account of Czech and Slovak paradiplomatic activity towards China, we have conducted an extensive mapping of interactions with China on the sub-national level in Czechia and Slovakia.

The study takes into account the 8 self-governing regions of Slovakia and 13 self-governing regions of Czechia and the capital city Prague (in the Czech local governance system, Prague is considered both a self-governing region and a municipality). On the municipal level, we have investigated the ties with China among 79 county-level cities in Slovakia. In Czechia, the study included 205 municipalities with extended powers. This sample composition was chosen due to the relative importance of the two municipality types within the local governance in the studied countries. This, however, in no way implies that paradiplomatic relations with China do not occur among smaller self-governing units.

Given the particularities of municipal organization in some larger cities (e.g. Prague in Czechia, or Bratislava and Košice in Slovakia), we have also considered their districts as independent actors, given that they elect their mayors and councils, and perform independent self-governance functions. In Bratislava, 17 such municipal districts were included. A study done in Košice included 22 districts. Similarly, in Prague, 22 districts were included in the study. A full list of the municipalities and regions included in the sample can be consulted in Annex 1 of this paper.

It needs to be stressed that it is not our aim to discourage Slovak local governments from engaging with Chinese partners. Mutual exchange, provided that it is done sustainably and equitably, can be beneficial to regional development. However, due to the authoritarian nature of the Chinese regime, which relies on a whole-of-society approach to achieve its interests (including paradiplomatic relations), engaging with Chinese entities carries specific risks, of which local authorities should be aware.

## Notes on methodology and transparency problems

In the mapping process, we have relied on several data sources. As a primary source, we have collected data via a standardized questionnaire that was distributed to all the examined Czech and Slovak actors via the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) procedure. This data was then supplemented and triangulated with data collected from municipal and regional websites, interviews with relevant stakeholders, media reports, and other available information.

In our study, we have focused on relationships of Czech and Slovak sub-national entities with various Chinese entities (chiefly provinces and municipalities, but also municipal districts, as well as other state or private Chinese entities) that are based on formal relations, i.e., they have a basis in some form of cooperation document between the two parties. We have classified the relationship level based on whether it was based on: (i) a memorandum of understanding (MoU) or letter of intent (LoI), or (ii) a formalized partnership agreement (typically sister cities/sister regions).

Typically, MoUs and Lols present a first stage of the mutual relations between sub-national entities that is later to be followed by an establishment of an official sister city relationship. In some cases, though, the MoU/Lol did not seem to be structured in a manner that would invite the signing of follow-up agreements. However, the fact that there is no formal relationship does not presume that other forms of interaction are not occurring; such cases of cooperation without a formal agreement were also identified in our research.

The transparency of cities and regions regarding their ties with Chinese partners and international cooperation, in general, varies greatly across Slovakia and Czechia. This is a problem that has been observed not only in their international relations but as an overall and systemic issue in municipal and regional governance.<sup>2</sup>

In some cases, such as the Czech Central Bohemian Region or the South Moravian Region, relatively comprehensive information is available on the official government website, together with the scans of cooperation documents. Overall, however, it can be said that there is a lack of information about the partnerships, the agreements concluded, the delegations that were received and in turn visited China, as well as their specific agenda.

The Czech FOIA enables the subjects to ask for payment for an extraordinarily “extensive search for information”.<sup>3</sup> In the case of two Czech regions, they conditioned response to the FOIA request with payment of roughly €400 (Moravian Silesian Region only sent a part off the requested information, with the rest pending the payment; Vysočina Region conditioned the entire response upon the fee payment). However, it is questionable if such a request is reasonable and was not only meant to discourage the authors from accessing the information, which they had to ultimately gather from open sources.

In Slovakia, we did not face such issues as Slovak FOIA allows the public entities only to bill for material costs and not the labor costs associated with providing the requested information.<sup>4</sup> The majority of Slovak cities or regions provided all the requested information. Only a

couple of entities claimed they were not able to provide some documents as they were stored only for a limited period.

Sometimes, offices did not disclose all the required details about their cooperation with China. In a few cases, any cooperation was denied but it was later proven not to be true based on publicly available information. Incomplete or absent information may be explained by efforts to hide potentially problematic information. However, it is the motivation to avoid bureaucratic burden, or a simple lack of proper records, especially in cases where the cooperation was initiated a long time ago under a different government, that seem as more plausible explanations.

As for Chinese sources, we have analyzed the official governmental and sub-governmental documents which have provided crucial insights into how Chinese actors perceive paradiplomacy and go about establishing relations on the local level.

## **Czech and Slovak paradiplomacy: Independent actors pursuing own agendas**

In the Czech and Slovak legal environment, regions and towns enjoy a high degree of independence in pursuing international relations. This independence is seen as an extension of their self-governing nature within Czech and Slovak sub-national governance.

Unlike in China (see below), paradiplomatic activities are hardly regulated in Czechia and Slovakia. In both countries, the main precondition to international cooperation is that the partnership agreements must be approved by the respective regional/municipal legislative bodies. International activities are logically limited to areas in which the municipalities and regions can exercise their self-governing competencies.

In the Czech case, the respective laws merely stipulate that municipalities and regions are permitted to engage in international cooperation with their counterparts.<sup>5</sup>

Slovak regulations are slightly more developed as they also provide for a reporting mechanism of sub-national international partnerships to the central government. Following a conclusion of the partnership agreement, the city or region should notify its conclusion to the regional agency of the Ministry of Interior. Before the agreement's conclusion, a municipality may consult the proposal with this agency (interestingly, such provision is missing in the case of inter-regional cooperation). In case the agreement is not in line with the Slovak constitution, laws, or runs contrary to the public interest, the Ministry of Interior agency may challenge such an agreement in court.<sup>6</sup> However, to date, no such cases are known.<sup>7</sup> Specific laws that regulate aspects of international cooperation within the EU already exist, however, complex regulation of paradiplomatic activities is still lacking.<sup>8</sup>

Previous research shows that for Slovak and Czech sub-national actors, the primary driver of the cooperation is typically the potential of future economic cooperation with the foreign partner.<sup>9</sup> In establishing international cooperation, sub-national units tend to focus their activities not only on cooperation with other local governments but also with foreign companies and chambers of commerce.<sup>10</sup>

## Chinese paradiplomacy: Heaven is high and the Emperor is far away?

The general picture of Chinese paradiplomacy is complex and does not allow simple conclusions. Due to the very nature of China's political system, it can be asserted that in China, the central government has more leverage available to instrumentalize local actors to achieve larger foreign policy goals, especially in case of major political disagreement. While the local actor may enjoy significant autonomy in practice, they are subordinated to larger policy goals in cases related to China's core interests.

Despite nominally being a centralized country under one-party leadership, China has often been called a quasi-federal system, where sub-national entities exert significant power.<sup>11</sup> Even in the issues of foreign policy, provincial and city governments have gained significant agency since the reform and opening-up period in the late 1970s, establishing relationships to pursue local interests abroad.<sup>12</sup> Thus, the sub-national actors have developed their policies in the larger framework set by the central government's strategies, which have in turn been informed and shaped by a bottom-up process, following the principle of "crossing the river by feeling the stones" that has characterized the Chinese reform process.<sup>13</sup>

## Sisterhood or Partnership?

In Chinese parlance, the term for the official sister city relationship is "friendship cities" or "friendship regions" (*youhao chengshi* or *youhao shengzhou* - 友好城市 / 友好省州). The term "sister city" is not used, because the Chinese term *zimei chengshi* (姊妹城市) implies a relationship between a younger and older sister, and thus a hierarchical rather than equitable relationship.<sup>14</sup> In this study, we will refer to sister city/province relationships to denote the higher status of the ties.

As is evident by patterns of cooperation between Chinese entities and international partners, the economic rationale has played a key role. Chinese provinces have been engaged in international contacts in an effort to promote international trade, FDI, and business links. According to data from 2016, 68.3% of the international sister city agreements signed by Chinese local governments were concluded with high-income economies and only 1.3% were with low-income economies as classified by the World Bank.<sup>15</sup>

Chinese localities often engage in mechanisms of trailblazing (creating new policies to be followed by central government), carpetbagging (modifying central policy by the different local implementation), and even resisting central level policies.<sup>16</sup> A notable example in this regard is the local agency under the Belt and Road Initiative, which was announced in its initial form in 2013. Under its framework, sub-national actors have tried not only to follow the general guidelines set by the central government but to actively shape the overall strategy in practice. In turn, the central government used the umbrella concept to incentivize the sub-national actors to fill it with concrete content.<sup>17</sup>

Foreign relations have become an extension of the competition between individual provinces for economic success, which has long been a feature of domestic politics.<sup>18</sup> One of the most conspicuous examples in recent years has been the competition via subsidies for direct railway freight lines to Europe, leading to severe inefficiencies.<sup>19</sup>

Different provinces have also tried to position themselves as key areas for cooperation with specific foreign countries or regions, which has been also the case under the China-CEE cooperation framework. For example, in the case of China-CEE relations, Ningbo<sup>20</sup> in Zhejiang Province and Hebei Province have been put forward as key actors on the Chinese side. This prioritization has not been without issues. Sometimes, the efforts of the central government to address the inefficiencies and concentrate resources by selecting specific provinces as key cooperation areas have angered other domestic actors.<sup>21</sup>



In general, the bottom-up characteristics of sub-national foreign policy activities have coexisted with top-down efforts by the central government to use sub-national actors as tools or intermediaries in foreign policy. Sub-national diplomacy in China is seen as a part of “public diplomacy” or people-to-people ties, which is supposed to serve a supporting role in pursuing China’s national goals.<sup>22</sup> The benefit of sub-national diplomacy is that it is typically not seen as political by outside observers and can thus be more effective than the efforts of the central government in achieving certain goals.<sup>23</sup>

An interesting example in this regard is the paradiplomatic activity of the Guangdong province, which has been said to have developed the paradiplomatic activities with Hong Kong before the British handover not only for economic reasons but also to help smooth the transfer of sovereignty back to China.<sup>24</sup> Sub-national relations can be a useful channel for contacts when government-level relations are problematic. This was, for example, the case of South Africa before the establishment of formal relations in 1997.<sup>25</sup>

At the same time, Chinese entities have raised political issues and protested against the decisions of their sister city governments, such as in the case of Beijing and Shanghai.<sup>26</sup> In the 1990s, after it was revealed that France planned to sell military aircraft to Taiwan, French companies were reportedly blocked from participating in the Guangzhou city subway tender.<sup>27</sup> In the 2014 report on Beijing’s sister city relationships, it is stressed that Beijing’s “sister city work is an extension of the overall foreign policy” and that “protecting nation’s sovereignty, security and core interests” is one of its key tasks.<sup>28</sup> The breakup of Prague’s relations with Beijing and Shanghai shows this in practice.

Foreign relations of sub-national actors are subject to a centralized system of control. No foreign affairs powers of sub-national entities are enshrined in China’s constitution, even if they have developed in a complex manner in practice. On top of the system of local Foreign Affairs Offices and Foreign Affairs Leading Groups on the provincial level, there are also the state-wide institutions tasked with managing sub-national relations: the Chinese People’s Association for

Friendship with Foreign Countries (CPAFFC) and the China Council for Promotion of International Trade (CCPIT). Various other united front organizations are also engaged in promoting sub-national ties.

The activities of sub-national actors are subject to central guidance. CPAFFC has set up the regulations for establishing official friendship relations with international partners.<sup>29</sup> On top of that, some localities have also released their regulations, which at times differ from or expand on the CPAFFC rules.<sup>30</sup> The CPAFFC regulations set out that the two partners should first sign a memorandum of cooperation or a letter of intent (LoI). Only after a period of cooperation should they proceed towards establishing a full partnership. Several memoranda and LoIs obtained as part of our research stipulate that the two partners should strive towards establishing a proper sisterhood, evidencing such a two-stage process in practice. All the official partnerships ultimately have to be approved by the CPAFFC and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The opinion of the Chinese Embassy in the host country is also sought. Regulations set out that the relationship with foreign partners should be established on the corresponding administrative level and that administrative entities under the county level should not in general establish international ties.

The CPAFFC regulations stress that there is a need to be “vigilant against Western anti-China forces’ attempts to Westernize and divide China through local exchanges”. In case of encountering “sensitive issues” in relations with international partners, the sub-national entities must consult with higher authorities.

The guidelines give special attention to the issue of Taiwan. Chinese entities are to build relationships with international partners that have a formal relationship with Taiwan only under the condition of their accepting the principles of establishment of bilateral relations (on the national level) and promising that the issue of “two Chinas” or “one China, one Taiwan” will not appear in their ties. Regulations also stipulate the acceptable names for Taiwan and the need to push the partner to limit its exchanges with Taiwan to strictly unofficial. The document lists the violation of the “One China Policy” as one of the potential reasons for severing the relationship.<sup>31</sup>

## The Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries

According to the official designation, the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries (CPAFFC) is a "national people's organization engaged in people-to-people diplomacy".<sup>32</sup> This nominally nongovernmental organization is a constituent part of China's foreign affairs system. It has also been described as a united front organization, although it is not subordinated to the United Front Work Department itself.<sup>33</sup>

CPAFFC was established in its initial form in 1954 and was tasked with developing relationships with countries with which Beijing did not have official diplomatic ties at the time. While its role has diminished after China's diplomatic isolation ended in the 1970s, it has been reinvigorated under Chinese leader Xi Jinping, playing a key role in China's global public diplomacy outreach under the Belt and Road Initiative.<sup>34</sup> CPAFFC organization is linked to Chinese MFA, although probably not directly subordinated. Throughout its history, it has been led by former diplomats or princelings, the descendants of Chinese key political figures, such as Li Xiaolin, the daughter of Li Xiannian, former President of China (1983-1988). Its current head is Lin Songtian, who last served as Ambassador to South Africa.

CPAFFC is charged with liaising with foreign counterparts across business, politics, culture, and other areas, complementing the official level diplomatic outreach. One of the roles of CPAFFC is also to "coordinate and supervise" the sub-national level partnerships between Chinese and foreign partners.

## 2. Overview of Czech and Slovak paradiplomacy with China

This chapter provides a general overview of the ties between Czech and Slovak sub-national entities and their Chinese partners based on the results of our survey and additional research from open sources.

Czech regions, rather than cities (the exception is Prague, which is both a city and a region), are the most important actors in the Czech-Chinese paradiplomacy, especially in terms of long-term interactions as opposed to one-off symbolic declarations. This is a logical result of them having more financial and personal resources to be dedicated to developing ties with foreign entities, while most cities lack dedicated bodies in charge of foreign relations. Moreover, Czech regions are a more symmetric partner to Chinese cities and provinces, although almost universally, the discrepancy in size is still significant.

Out of 13 Czech regions and Prague, only one has not signed any kind of formal cooperation agreement with Chinese partners. On top of that, among the studied local governments, there are 16 Czech cities and towns and 4 Prague city districts that have had some sort of cooperation with Chinese partners.

In Slovakia, the situation is rather similar, with the majority of regions (6 out of 8) having an already established, agreement-based form of cooperation with their partner, or at least having such agreements in works. However, Slovak cities are also important players in such relations, with 14 Slovak cities having signed cooperation agreements with various Chinese partners.

On the Czech side, South Moravian Region is the region with the most treaty-based partnerships with Chinese counterparts, having established relations with three Chinese provinces (Guangdong,

Hainan, Hebei) and further cooperation documents signed with the Shaanxi Province and the city of Cangzhou. On the Chinese side, Hebei was the most frequent partner of Czech counterparts, with sister city relationships with the South Moravian Region and Moravian Silesian region, and a cooperation document signed with the Karlovy Vary Region. The only other Chinese actor cooperating with more than one partner was Cangzhou. The prominence of Hebei and Cangzhou can be explained by the tradition of cooperation with the China-Czechoslovak Friendship Farm<sup>ii</sup> which is located in Cangzhou, and the overall focus of Hebei Province on relationships with CEE partners.<sup>35</sup>

In Slovakia, no city or region has established formal ties on the partnership agreement level with multiple Chinese cities or provinces. The city of Nitra is the only one with multiple formal relations of any sort already established, as it has signed an Lol on cooperation with the city of Cangzhou (Hebei) and a memorandum with the city of Xianning (Hubei).

Preexistent or potential economic links often provide a basis for establishing formal cooperation between sub-national entities. For example, the Czech town of Nymburk established cooperation with Mianyang, the seat of the Changhong company that has invested in Nymburk. In the cases of Bohumín-Jiangyin, Jablonec nad Nisou-Beihai, Šumperk-Minhang District (Shanghai)<sup>iii</sup> in Czechia and Nitra-Cangzhou in Slovakia, cooperation was established with an explicit purpose to help specific local businesses or on their initiative. The support of the local government was seen as an important political step to create a basis for economic cooperation.

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<sup>ii</sup> In 1956, the then-Czechoslovakia gifted some 600 pieces of farming machinery to China, and dispatched a group of mechanics to train Chinese farmers. A China-Czechoslovak Friendship Farm was founded in honor of the donation, employing the donated equipment. The farm continues to operate but has since turned into a high-development zone. See Cangzhou City People's Government. 2011. "中捷产业园区（中捷友谊农场）概况" (Overview of the China-Czechoslovak industry zone (China-Czechoslovak Friendship Farm)". Cangzhou City People's Government, November 29, 2011.

<sup>iii</sup> The cooperation agreement was signed by Šumperk but according to town representatives, it was never approved by the Chinese side.

Similar backgrounds of cities in terms of culture and tourism can also be a background for partnership. In Slovakia, relations between Bardejov and Lijiang have developed explicitly on the basis of both having UNESCO World Heritage sites. In the case of the Beijing district of Xicheng, which is noted for its historical heritage, it has followed cooperation with spa resort towns in both Czechia (Mariánské Lázně)<sup>iv</sup> and Slovakia (Piešťany) as tourism hotspots.

Cooperation also often develops between the cities from regions where relations have already been established on the regional level. This pattern can be seen in the partnerships between Czech cities Jihlava and Wuhan, as well as Třebíč and Yichang (both concluded after Vysočina Region and Hubei Province established relations), Olomouc and Kunming (under Olomouc Region – Yunnan Province relations), and Ostrava and Suzhou (Moravian Silesian Region and Jiangsu Province).

In Slovakia, relations between Martin and Ningbo followed the same logic, as they were established in the light of the Žilina Region and Zhejiang Province partnership. In fact, in several cases, preexistent links have been explicitly stated as a motivation for establishing ties by the representatives of sub-national entities.

In terms of the administrative level of the partnership, the balance between the Czech and Chinese partners remains rather relative due to the differences in demography and size, present in practically all cases. In the case of Czechia, there is no partnership with the higher status of sister city/province partnership between different levels of government on two sides. However, there is cooperation on a lower formal level between the Zlín Region and Shenyang, Karlovy Vary and Changping District (Beijing), or Hradec Králové Region with Chongqing municipality (deemed inactive).

In Slovakia, the situation is similar, with towns and cities mostly partnering with each other on both sides, such as Žilina-Changchun or Košice-Wuhan. In the same sense, Slovak regions are mostly twinning

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<sup>iv</sup> As a part of a memorandum with a group of spa resort towns from the Karlovy Vary region.

and cooperating with Chinese regions, such as in the case of Žilina Region-Zhejiang Province, or Prešov Region-Hebei province. An exception to the rule in Slovakia may be the partnerships between Chinese city districts and Slovak cities. In Slovakia, we have found two such partnerships, with the city of Spišská Nová Ves having a formal partnership with Tongzhou District (Beijing) and the city of Piešťany having a formal partnership with Xicheng District (Beijing).

While it may be expected that the cooperation agreements would embed the cooperation within larger initiatives, such as China's Belt and Road Initiative or the 16+1 platform, there are only a few instances.

The city of Ústí nad Labem signed a Belt and Road Memorandum with the city of Yiwu (Zhejiang Province), concerning an extension of railway freight line between the two cities. According to Chinese sources, the Olomouc Region signed a BRI memorandum with Fujian Province,<sup>36</sup> although this was not reported in Czechia and no such document was provided by the regional government in their response to the FOIA request.

In Slovakia, Prešov Region was the most active local government within the 16+1 platform. Prešov Region supported the establishment of the China-CEEC Association of Provincial Governors in 2015. Prešov Region's MoU with Hebei Province was signed during the 3rd China-CEEC Local Leaders Meeting in 2016. It also adopted alongside other participants the so-called Tangshan Consensus, a document aimed at promoting further cooperation between Chinese and CEE municipalities in areas like cultural exchange, technological and scientific innovation, energy conservation, or agriculture.<sup>37</sup> In 2021, Prešov Region also participated in several online events under the 16+1 framework. Besides Prešov Region, Žilina Region was also somewhat active in the 16+1 framework, as it repeatedly participated in the China-CEEC Investment and Trade Expo in Ningbo (Zhejiang Province, which is also a partner province of Žilina Region).

There have also been cases when Czech entities opened representative offices to represent their interests in China. Both the Olomouc Region and the Central Bohemian Region opened

representative offices in their partner provinces via private actors. Moravian Silesian Region was also planning to open a representative office in Suzhou in the partner Jiangsu Province, but the plans did not materialize.<sup>38</sup> The Olomouc Region decided to withdraw its support for the representative office in Fujian in 2018, citing a lack of results.<sup>39</sup> Representatives of the Foreign Office of the Central Bohemian Region were not able to confirm whether the representative office in Chengdu is still functioning as of 2021. In Slovakia, similar modes of cooperation via representative offices were not established, although it was discussed in the framework of the cooperation between Žilina Region and Changchun Province in the mid-1990s.

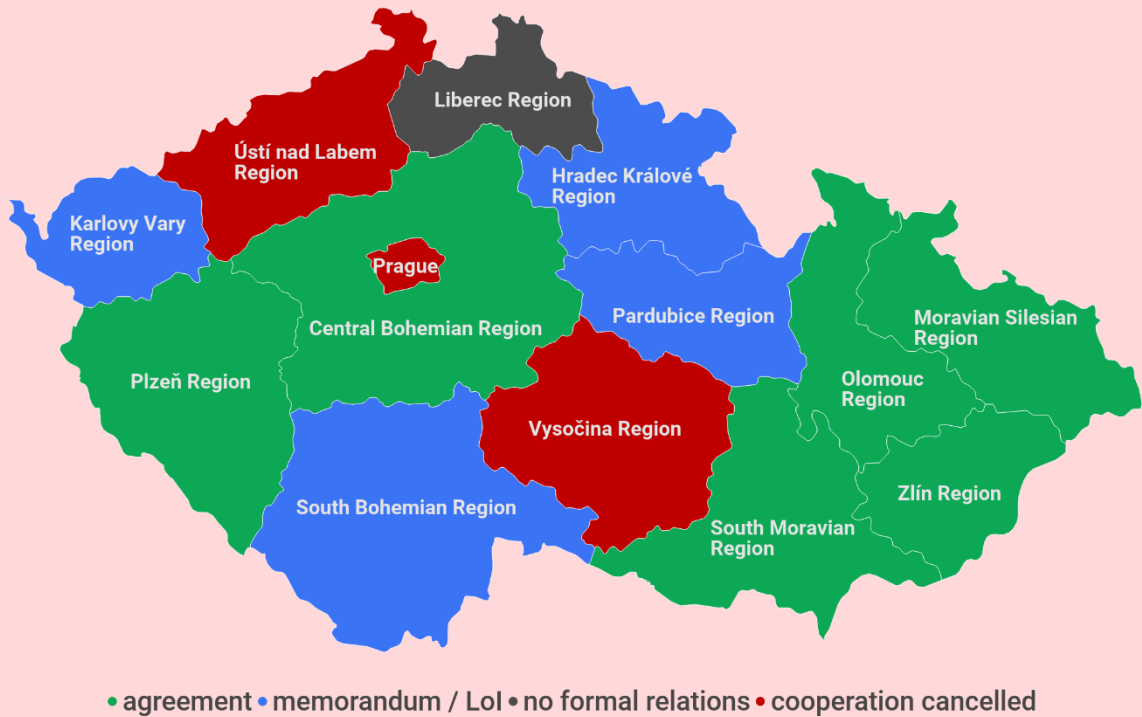
Out of the 37 responses we received regarding the assessed benefits of the cooperation (23 from Czechia and 13 from Slovakia), in 15 cases (9 Czech and 6 Slovak) the regions and cities deemed the cooperation positively, in 4 cases (3 Czech and 1 Slovak) negatively, in 11 (7 Czech and 4 Slovak) neutrally and in 7 (4 Czech and 3 Slovak) declined to respond due to the nature of the question.<sup>40</sup> Consequently, the perceptions of the cooperation may not be assessed adequately. As the questions were posed in 2021, it is also possible that the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and the inability to maintain contact with Chinese counterparts might have contributed to the assessment. Several partnerships were described as inactive and barely developing in any way following the agreement's signing.

Regarding the initiation of the relationship, most responses indicated that the Chinese side made the initial contact and expressed a desire to start a relationship with the Slovak and Czech partners. In some cases, regional governments played a role in 'pitching' the potential of partnering with Chinese cities to the towns located within their respective regions (e.g. Martin in Slovakia, Jihlava in Czechia). Local businesses and business associations have also been identified as actors. In some cases, though, the responding cities and regions were unable to respond to the query, citing no archival records and/or no longer employing the staff that was responsible for the relationship at the time of its establishment.

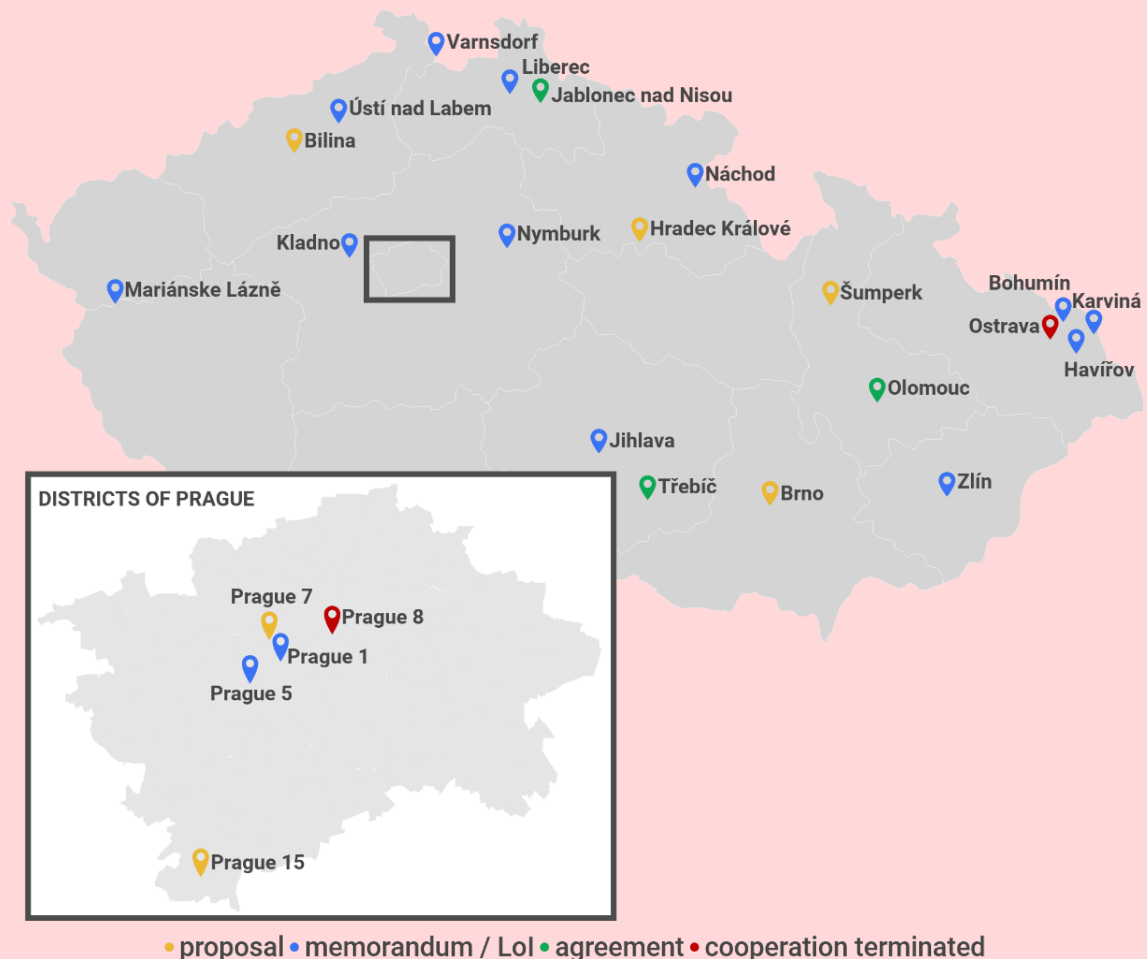


In some cases, the recipients of Chinese proposals decided to reject them. The second-largest Czech city Brno rejected the proposal to cooperate with Chengdu (Sichuan province) at the very beginning of the negotiation process, without the proposal even making it to the city council. Hradec Králové also rejected a proposal to cooperate with Liaocheng (Shandong province) during the city council deliberations. Interestingly, the Czech side was not the only one refusing to cooperate; the Minhang District of Shanghai did not sign a finalized agreement that had already been approved by the Šumperk assembly. In Slovakia, the Eastern city of Prešov rejected a cooperation offer from Xinyu (Jiangxi province). The town's assembly opposed the proposal due to a lack of substantiveness in the proposal.

**Figure 1:** Czech regions – status of cooperation with Chinese partners (in case of multiple relations, the highest level is recorded)



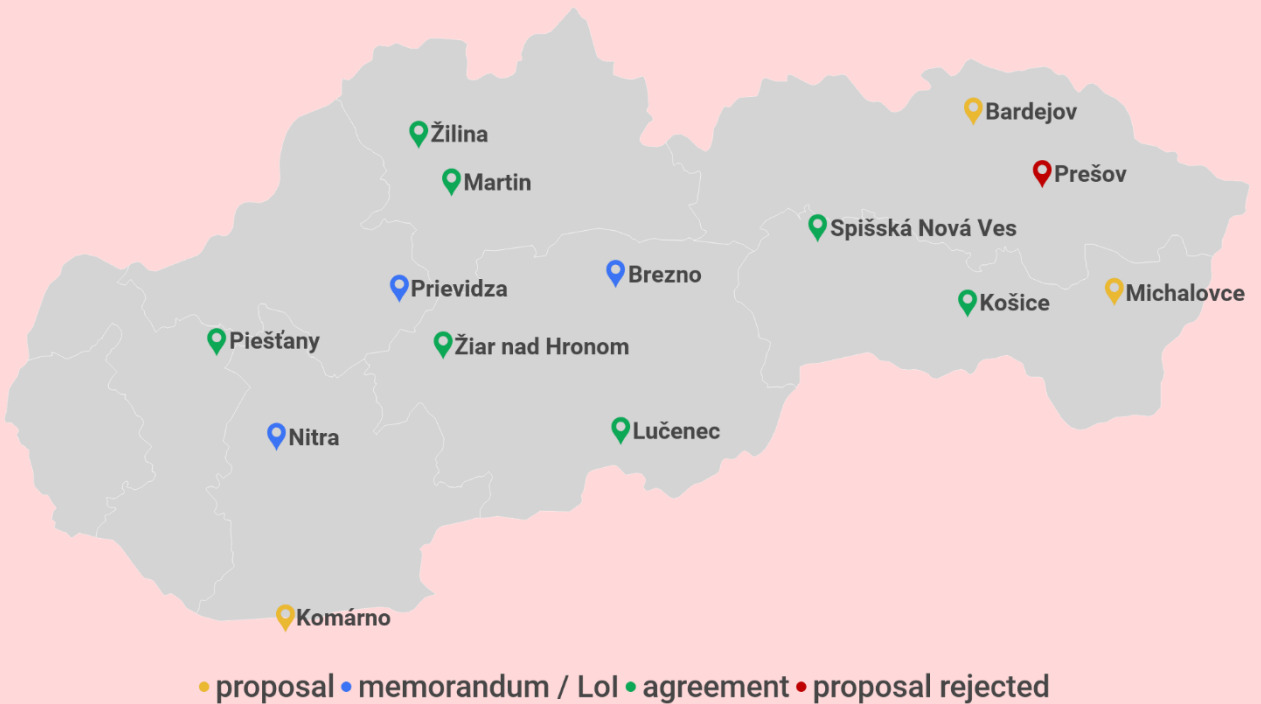
**Figure 2:** Czech municipalities – status of cooperation with Chinese partners (in case of multiple relations, the highest level is recorded)



**Figure 3:** Slovak regions – status of cooperation with Chinese partners (in case of multiple relations, the highest level is recorded)



**Figure 4:** Slovak municipalities – status of cooperation with Chinese partners (in case of multiple relations, the highest level is recorded)



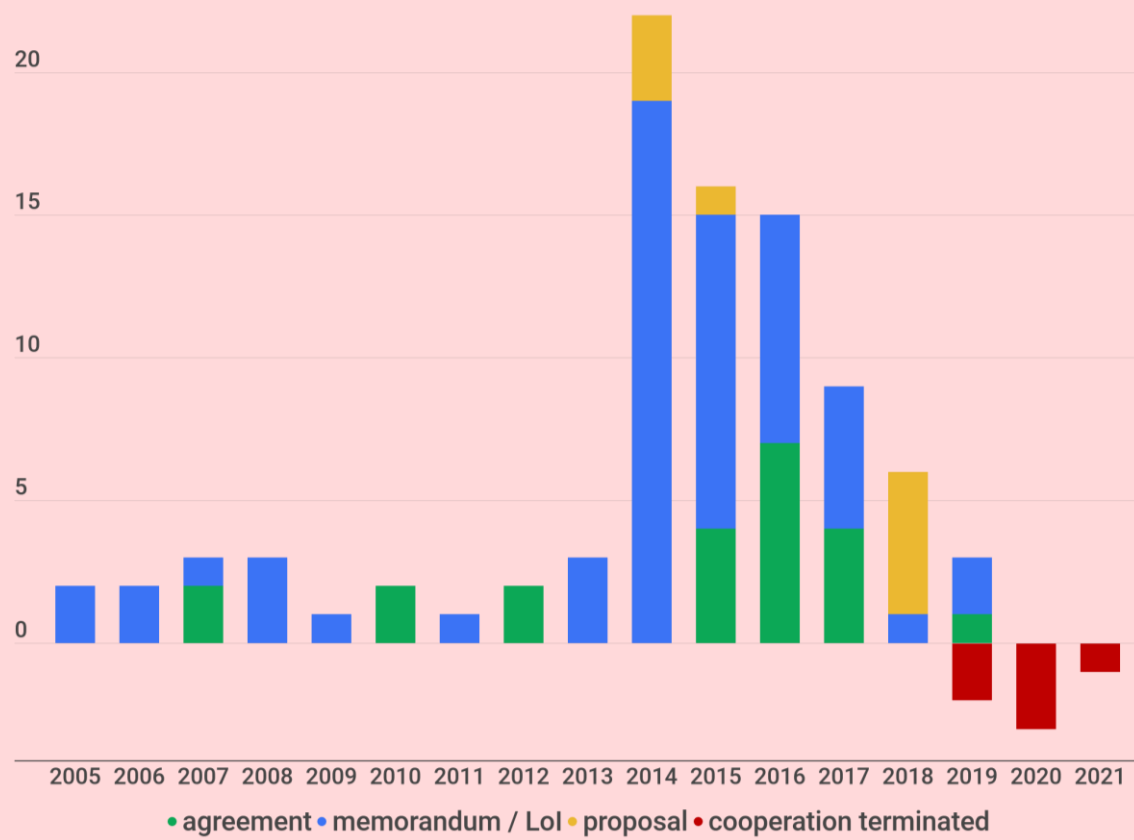
### 3. Evolving paradiplomacy between Czechia, Slovakia, and China

Relations on the sub-national level between Slovak and Czech and Chinese entities have gone through two distinct phases (1993-2011; 2012 onwards), which have roughly mirrored the developments in bilateral ties on the national level.

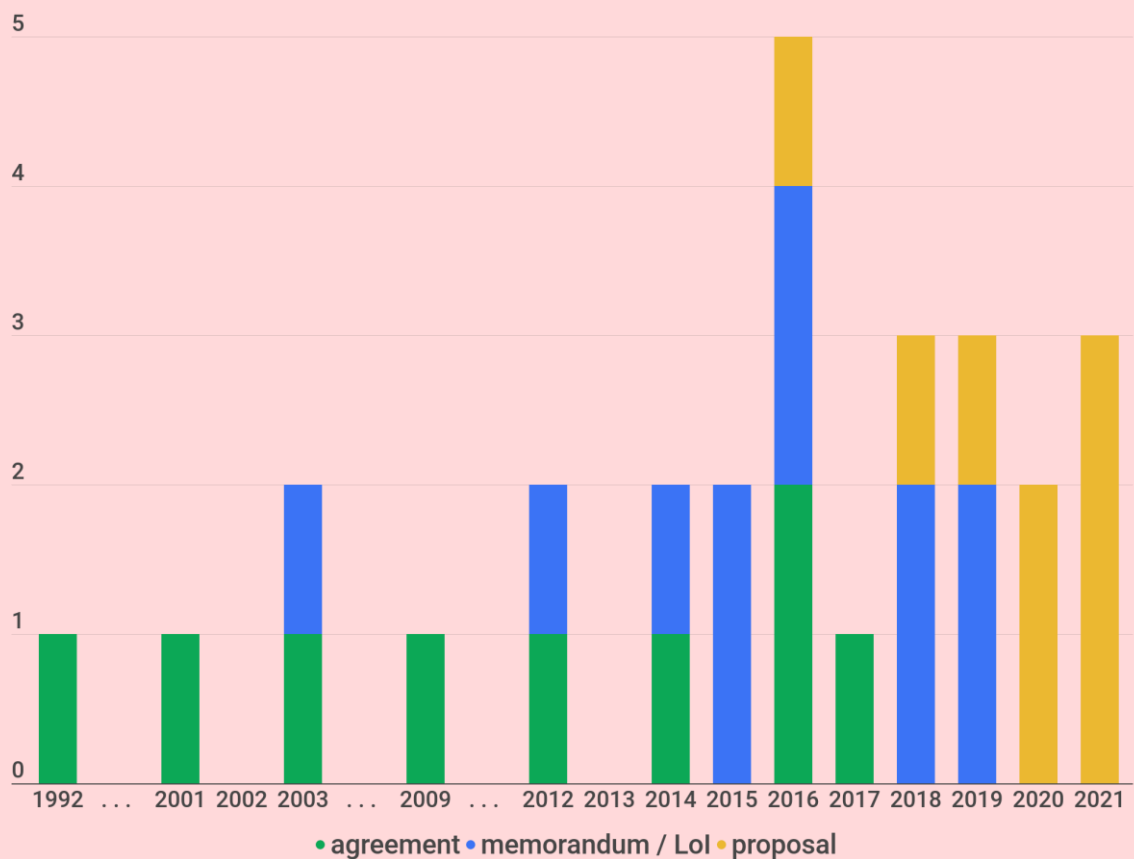
The first phase corresponds with the period starting with the establishment of independent Slovakia and Czechia (following the split-up of former Czechoslovakia), through the two countries' gradual integration into the structures of the global West, and ending with the financial crisis and its repercussions.

The starting point of the second period came when reinvigorated bilateral relations and cooperation within the larger 16+1 and BRI format led to an increase in interactions. This period has led to the biggest growth of sub-national partnerships, which peaked around 2014-2016. As evident from the data, in the case of Czechia, there have been several cancellations of cooperation since 2019, with overall cooperation on a downward trend with no new cooperation proposals in process. A similar trend was observed in Slovakia, even though no partnerships were canceled in the same period.

**Figure 5:** Number of newly concluded cooperation documents and proposals between Czech local governments and Chinese entities



**Figure 6:** Number of newly concluded cooperation documents and proposals between Slovak local governments and Chinese entities



## Early relations (1993-2011)

Relations between China and the then Czechoslovakia, which was divided into two independent states in 1993, were significantly influenced by the 1989 democratic revolution, which stood in contrast with the crackdown on protests in China. The different outlook on political values, as well as geopolitical aims, created a distance between China and the two countries, with low interest in relations on both sides.

Czech-China relations in the 1990s were characterized by a high level of mutual distrust and political tensions over sensitive issues such as Taiwan, Tibet, and human rights. High-level political contact was limited.<sup>41</sup> Likewise, no substantial local-level relations developed. At the same time, some local governments also started to express political views on China, participating in the Flag for Tibet annual event, which started in 1996. Besides the lack of interest and political will, another limiting factor was the absence of administrative regions as self-governing units, which were created only in 2000, leaving municipalities as sole paradiplomatic actors in Czechia.

The majority of Slovak cities and regions started developing their relations with China only after the turn of the millennium.<sup>42</sup> A notable exception here is the city of Žilina, which signed a partnership agreement with Changchun (Jilin Province) in November 1992, a month before Slovakia's independence. This is the longest-running partnership between either a Czech or Slovak sub-national entity and their Chinese counterpart.<sup>43</sup> The core of the agreement focuses on the usual topics of economic development through knowledge and tech sharing as well as cultural exchanges and other areas of cooperation.

In 2005, Central Bohemian Region and Plzeň Region were the first Czech regions to establish any kind of relationship with Chinese counterparts, signing a memorandum of cooperation with Sichuan and Zhejiang provinces, respectively. While there is no direct link discernible, the birth of first partnerships was concurrent with the thaw in Czech-China relations under the Prime Minister Jiří Paroubek (social-democratic ČSSD party) government in 2005-2006, when

Paroubek visited China and the Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jiabao visited Czechia for the first time. Marking a first significant foray into this dimension of the relationship, in 2007, representatives of 9 out of 13 Czech regions visited China as a group on a tour across China, visiting Beijing, Shanghai, Sichuan, and Yunnan.<sup>44</sup>

Although not on the same level as Czechia, Slovakia's sub-national relations with China also started taking a more coherent shape during a similar timeframe. In 2001, Žiar nad Hronom, a town in central Slovakia with around 20,000 inhabitants, signed an agreement on mutually friendly cooperation with a much larger prefecture-level city of Zibo (Shandong Province), with around 2 million inhabitants at the time.<sup>45</sup> The agreement was concluded as a part of the 2001 trade show in Linz (Austria), and its crux was focused on the interests of Chinese companies to do business in the aluminum and textile industries in the region. Following this, a group of four Slovak regional representatives was invited to Shandong province to sign the agreement.<sup>46</sup> However, there were no follow-ups on this agreement, and currently, there are no relations or communication between Žiar nad Hronom and Zibo.<sup>47</sup>

Two years later, in 2003, the Bratislava region signed a memorandum as well as a sister city agreement with Shanghai. This marked the first time a Slovak region entered into relations with a Chinese sub-national entity. As per the agreements, they aimed to focus on cooperation in the generally nondescript "cultural, economic, educational and other activities."

Slovakia's relations with China during this time were much warmer than those of Czechia, with frequent government visits which were also followed by several regional level visits. In 2004, Bratislava's mayor attended a Boao Forum for Asia conference on city development in Beijing, and in 2008 representatives of environmental protection offices of various Chinese provinces visited Bratislava, while the representatives of the Standing Committee of the People's Congress in the Henan Province visited Nitra.

Of note is also the visit of the working group of the Education, Science, Culture and Public Health Committee of the 11th National People's Congress to Trenčín in the same year. Furthermore, the 2008 visit from the Zhejiang Province to the Žilina region would later serve as the basis for further development of their inter-regional cooperation. These early interactions later served as a basis for future development of relations after the founding of the 16+1 platform in 2012.



## Delegation tourism

Frequent visits between local authorities do not necessarily reflect the quality of the relationship. An unusually high number of Chinese delegations were found to be visiting the small town of Český Brod near Prague. Between 2016 and 2019, the town issued 21 invitations for official Chinese delegations. The program of the visits has ranged from learning about local waste management, exchanging of experience in fishery and agriculture or urban planning and administration. According to our data, this is a frequency much higher than for virtually all other Czech local governments, even in much bigger cities. At the same time, no reciprocal visits from Český Brod to China took place during the observed period

A follow-up investigation based on our data by the newspaper Deník N found that similar situations occurred in other small towns around Prague.<sup>48</sup> For instance, dozens of Chinese delegations have visited Mělník since 2010. Again, no reciprocal official visits to China were made by the representatives of Czech local authorities. The visits were facilitated by travel agencies set up by the local Chinese diaspora. One of the agencies, Wings Travel, cooperated with former Czech Prime Minister Paroubek (ČSSD) in his lobbying activities in China.<sup>49</sup> In Mělník, the city was paid 300 EUR per visit, while in Český Brod, the delegations provided material gifts to the hosts. The repeated visits seem not to have led to any kind of follow-up cooperation, with no formal cooperation documents signed.

The most likely motivation was to get a Schengen visa with the use of official invitations that could be presented together with the visa application. The location of the towns near Prague was not accidental, as it enables convenient travel arrangements. The local travel agencies served as a middleman in this process. The delegations usually later left Czechia for other EU countries.

## Maturing relations and critical reactions (since 2012)

Since 2012, Sino-Czech and Sino-Slovak sub-national relations the most dynamic period. This has been happening against the backdrop of the China-CEE cooperation, the so-called 16+1 format, which was established in 2012, as well as the development of the Belt and Road Initiative (initially known as One Belt One Road) since 2013.

In 2012, Czech-China relations were at a turning point as they were still reeling from the impact of China's reaction to the 2009 meeting of Czech Prime Minister Jan Fisher with the Dalai Lama in Prague, and also the 2012 meeting of the Czech Ambassador to the UK Michael Žantovský with the Tibetan leader. This period was marked by a diplomatic freeze of high-level contacts.<sup>50</sup> Despite the diplomatic freeze, new sub-national-level partnerships were still forged. Indeed, there were strong signs of interest of regions in cooperation with China and overcoming the troubled ties, preceding the change on the national level.

In 2011, the Chinese Ambassador to the Czechia attended the meeting of the Council of the Association of Czech Regions (AK ČR), where he "in detail" described China's position on yet another upcoming visit of the Dalai Lama to the Czechia.<sup>51</sup> The press release from the meeting echoed the consensus of regions' leaders to develop relations with China:

"Respect for the principles of the One China Policy, territorial integrity, and non-interference in internal affairs are seen by AK ČR Council as a precondition and a part of traditional friendly ties between China and the Czechia, and as a way to make use of the potential present in mutual relations. Members of the AK ČR Council resolutely believe that it is necessary to avoid moves that could negatively impact efforts to reach the level of relations that [China has with] other EU nations..."<sup>52</sup>

This need for a new approach of Czech regions was explained by the hope that Chinese investments could mitigate the fallout of the economic crisis and bring new local employment opportunities.

In Czechia, the opening on the sub-national level that appeared to be underway in 2010 was soon followed by developments on the national level. Views on China were gradually changing, motivated mostly by an expectation of China becoming an important economic partner. In 2012, Prime Minister Petr Nečas (Civic Democratic Party – ODS) attended the Warsaw summit which set the foundations for the 16+1 cooperation platform. Nečas also criticized the purported ‘Dalailamism’ of the Czech foreign policy which he believed inhibited the prospects of pragmatic cooperation with China. President Miloš Zeman was elected president in 2013, becoming one of the most important supporters of pursuing closer ties with China. The Zeman-appointed caretaker government of Prime Minister Jiří Rusnok in 2013 made the first moves toward a ‘restart’ in bilateral relations, which was finalized by Prime Minister Bohuslav Sobotka (Czech Social Democratic Party – ČSSD) government, which entered into office in 2014.<sup>53</sup> Sub-national ties followed the trend. The high point of cooperation came in 2014-2017 when most of the new partnerships were concluded. In April 2016, the Czech-China relations reached their apex, with the Chinese President Xi Jinping visiting Prague.<sup>54</sup> This was also accompanied by a signature of the Prague-Beijing sister city agreement, and Xi Jinping was given a symbolic key to Prague.<sup>55</sup>

Czechia became a leader of sub-national cooperation within the larger 16+1 cooperation framework. In 2014, Prague hosted the China-CEE Local Leaders’ meeting and the China-CEEC Association of Provincial Governors was established. The Governor of Moravian-Silesian Region Miroslav Novák (ČSSD) was selected as one of the co-chairs of the Association.<sup>56</sup> Most of the Czech regions indicated participation in this Association, although only a few documents establishing the participation were found during our research. Zhejiang Province also signed a cooperation agreement with AK ČR, presenting itself as a key cooperation region for ties with China.

A political reshuffle on both the sub-national and national levels changed the landscape of the Czech policy towards China. In 2016, regional elections led to ČSSD losing its hitherto dominant position on the local level. This was followed by nationwide elections in 2017, which resulted in a new coalition dominated by the ANO party, a catch-

all populist party led by oligarch Andrej Babiš. Finally, a new coalition headed by the Pirate Party replaced ANO as a leading political force in Prague in 2018.

The weaker interest of the new political leadership on both the national and sub-national levels in developing ties with China was augmented by negative developments in bilateral relations. Most of the economic promises went unfulfilled, and the 'flagship' of Chinese investments CEFC floundered. Most of its assets were taken over by the Chinese state-owned company CITIC.<sup>57</sup> Since 2018, conflicting issues including Taiwan, involvement of Chinese companies in 5G networks, Tibet, and human rights have received more public attention and complicated bilateral ties. At the same time, major potential Chinese projects on the regional level, such as the Spa Resort in South Moravian Region or a Czech-Chinese industry zone in the Central Bohemian Region have not come to fruition or have been repeatedly delayed.<sup>58</sup>

Here, we can observe a close link between the developments on the national and sub-national levels. Since 2019, several partnerships of Czech regions and cities with Chinese partners have been terminated. The lack of interest was also manifested in the downgrading of participation on sub-national level cooperation formats within 16+1. No Czech regions were represented at the 2019 and 2021 local leaders' meetings. When AK ČR was approached with a request to nominate Governor Miroslav Novák's (ČSSD / Moravian Silesian Region) successor as a co-chair of the China-CEEC Association of Provincial Governors, there was no response from the Czech regions, with Czechia apparently losing the position of chair.<sup>59</sup>

In two cases (Prague-Beijing, Prague-Shanghai), a partnership was terminated by the Chinese side in reaction to Prague's planned move to terminate the relationship with Beijing after unsuccessful efforts to renegotiate it over the One China Policy clause and subsequent decision to establish a partnership with Taipei. In one case (Ostrava-Suzhou), the partnership was left to expire by the Chinese partner despite Ostrava's effort to renew it. In three cases, a partnership was terminated by the Czech side (Ústí nad Labem Region-Anhui Province,

Vysočina Region-Hubei Province, Prague 8 District-Fengtai District of Beijing).

Lack of results and political considerations were cited on the Czech side as reasons for severing the cooperation. In the Ústí nad Labem Region-Anhui case, the relationship was severed together with three other international partnerships based on the absence of results. At the same time, the regional officials referred to the limited economic resources after the pandemic and “geopolitical developments”.<sup>60</sup> In the case of Vysočina Region-Hubei cooperation, it was deemed “ineffective”<sup>61</sup> by the new governor who proposed the termination. Finally, in the Prague 8 District-Fengtai District (Beijing) case, the new leadership considered the cooperation with the Chinese partner as a personal initiative of the previous deputy mayor, with no actual results.<sup>62</sup> In all the cases, the cancellation of the agreement was initiated by political leadership different from the one which originally inked the partnership.

The COVID-19 pandemic brought a halt to most of the interactions with Chinese partners. On the other hand, the pandemic presented an opportunity to showcase the quality of existing relations through donations of medical equipment. The data for Czechia shows that the vast majority of donations were undertaken within the framework of existing formal relations (see Appendix 3). The donations were also reciprocal since the donations by Czech entities in the early phases of the pandemic were later followed by those from China as the pandemic situation shifted. On the national level, an “air bridge” was instituted between Czechia and China in March 2021 for the deliveries of a predominantly commercial character.<sup>63</sup> As of summer 2021, none of the Czech cities or regions within the studied sample mentioned activities to establish new cooperation with Chinese partners.

Following the initial watershed moment in Sino-Slovak paradiplomatic relations in 2008, from 2011 to 2019, there were a number of visits or agreements and memoranda signed between Slovak and Chinese regions and cities each year. A crucial event in Slovak-China relations came in 2015 when Slovakia was among the first European countries to sign a memorandum with China on the Belt and Road Initiative.<sup>64</sup> At

the same time, relations on a sub-national level were being reinforced as well. In 2012, 2014, and 2015, two MoUs were signed each year.

At the same time, the Slovak central government seemed to be losing enthusiasm for developing closer ties with China. During the 2016 summit of the 16+1 platform, Slovakia's Prime Minister Robert Fico (SMER-SD) was one of the very few heads of government not in attendance. Likewise, Slovakia did not send a high-level delegation to the 2017 Belt and Road Summit in Beijing. Coupled with the fallout of the meeting between President Andrej Kiska and the Dalai Lama in 2016, bilateral relations have entered a cool period.<sup>65</sup> However, it was during this time that the efforts to establish new relations on the local level reached the zenith. In 2016 alone, five new memoranda and cooperation agreements were signed, while between 2015 and 2017, 35 mutual sub-national level visits took place.

In 2018 and 2019, Slovakia's relations with China were mostly represented through the presence of Prime Minister Peter Pellegrini (then SMER-SD; now HLAS-Social Democracy) at the 16+1 summits in Sofia (Bulgaria) and Dubrovnik (Croatia). Besides that, there was little to no development in government-level relations. That would be until mid-2019 when Slovak President Zuzana Čaputová met with Wang Yi, Chinese Minister of Foreign Affairs. After she raised the issue of human rights during the visit, a number of Slovak politicians attempted to push back, even going as far as the Slovak Speaker of the Parliament Andrej Danko (SNS) inviting his Chinese counterpart to 'mend' the relations.<sup>66</sup>

Following the 2020 parliamentary elections in Slovakia as well as the COVID-19 outbreak, the lukewarmness of some Slovak politicians towards China was affirmed. As one of the authors of this paper noted elsewhere, "in just three months, Slovak political representation objected to Chinese misinformation and mask diplomacy in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, called on China to release the Panchen Lama and other political prisoners, supported Taiwan's accession to the World Health Organization, and decried China's unilateral imposition of security legislation on Hong Kong".<sup>67</sup>

However, compared to Czechia, the realm of sub-national relations was only negligibly impacted by the negative developments in inter-governmental relations. No Slovak cities and regions terminated their agreement with Chinese partners. In 2021, there were five new partnerships in the 'development' stage, even if cooperation was interrupted due to the pandemic.

Besides these five cases, in September 2020 the Prešov City Council did not recommend further pursuing relations with the city of Xinyu, due to a lack of specificity in the cooperation proposal, as well as the wish to prioritize relations with EU-based cities.<sup>68</sup> This showcases an interesting distinction, as the Prešov Region, to which the city of Prešov belongs, has been one of the most active in terms of relations with China.

## 4. Politics meeting paradiplomacy

Although ties on the sub-national level are usually seen as apolitical, there has been a strong political element behind the development of ties with China. In the following chapter, we will explore what domestic political constellations have led to the development of relations with Chinese partners, what has been the role of politically connected business, and how value-based issues (e.g. human rights) have been addressed.

### Political Party Support

Political party affiliation of local government leaders was a decisive factor in spearheading the sub-national cooperation with Chinese actors. In both Czechia and Slovakia, politicians from social democratic backgrounds emerged as the main drivers of establishing new paradiplomatic relations with Chinese partners.<sup>69</sup>

In Czechia, based on the analysis of the party affiliation of mayors/region governors at the time of the signature of cooperation agreements with the Chinese side, the preponderance of social-democratic ČSSD party affiliation is clear. The key role of the ČSSD in promoting relations with China is indisputable. In the 2014-2017 period, ČSSD was the leading party of the government that developed a policy of engaging China. At the same time, ČSSD had a dominant position on the sub-national level. In the 2008-2012 period, all governors of regions were from the ČSSD party. In the 2012-2016 period, all but two hailed from ČSSD. This political situation enabled better coordination between the national and sub-national levels in promoting ties with China. As a result, as many as 56% of all relations with Chinese subjects were established under the leadership of ČSSD governors and mayors.



In the 2006-2016 period, the ČSSD governor of the South Moravian Region Michal Hašek served as the chair of the Association of Czech Regions (AK ČR). Already in 2012, Hašek led a delegation of AK ČR to China, which doubled as a party delegation of ČSSD. During the visit, AK ČR signed a memorandum of cooperation with the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries (CPAFFC). At the same time, according to Chinese reports, ČSSD signed a memorandum with the International Liaison Department of CCP.<sup>70</sup> Before the visit, Hašek proclaimed that "I am convinced that it is not a mistake to travel to China, [on the contrary, it is a mistake] not to travel [to] China." Hašek added, "Our goal for this visit, just as for a number of our neighboring countries and EU members, is to gain a powerful ally in the fight against the impact of the economic crisis."<sup>71</sup> Hašek and other active or former ČSSD politicians have also been active in supporting ties with China through their personal business activities.

In contrast, the cancellation of the cooperation initiated by the Czech side was exclusively under the parties that had before been in the opposition, whether on the local or national level. In Prague, the cancellation of the partnership was initiated by the center-left Mayor Zdeněk Hřib (Pirates). In the Vysočina Region, Ústí nad Labem Region, and Prague 8 District, representatives of Civic Democrats (ODS) were at the helm when the partnership was terminated.

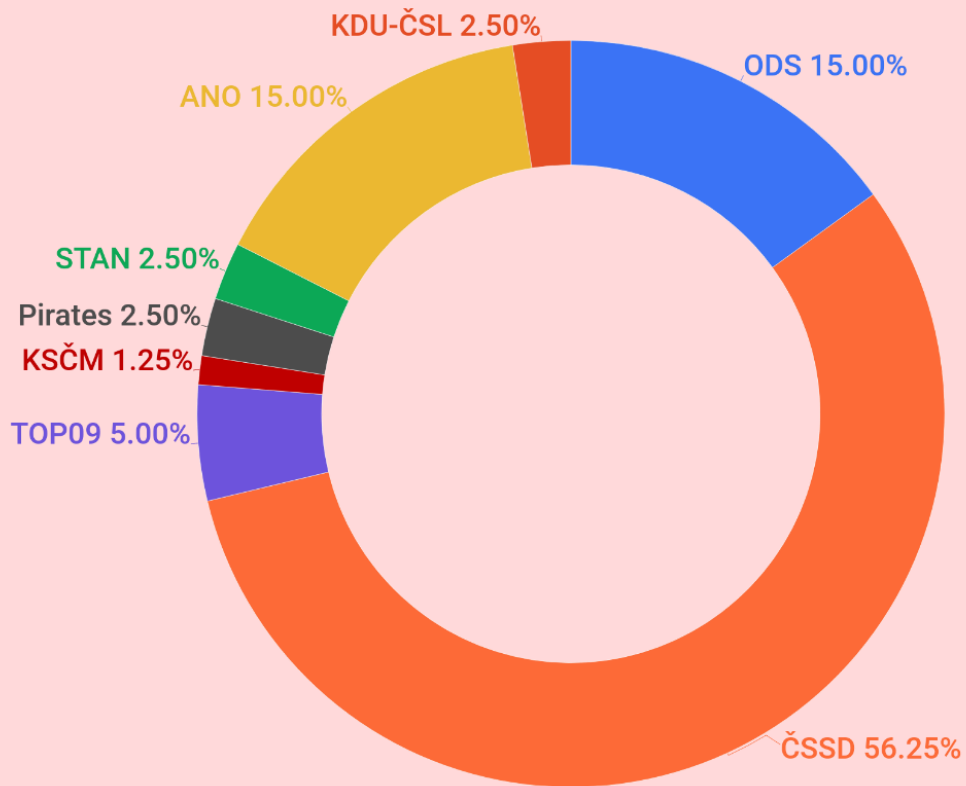
In Slovakia, the links between political affiliations and cooperation with China are less proclaimed, though not insignificant. The largest share of relations with China was established under the tenure of social democratic mayors and governors (42%), a notable similarity to the situation in Czechia. This was followed by the relations entered into by the independents (32%).

Most relations with Chinese partners were established when the social-democratic party SMER-SD was a dominant political force in the country. As was described above, even though SMER-SD repeatedly proclaimed its intent to promote cooperation with China, its approach to China was much more lukewarm than that of the Czech Social Democrats, leading to a conclusion that party affiliations do not play

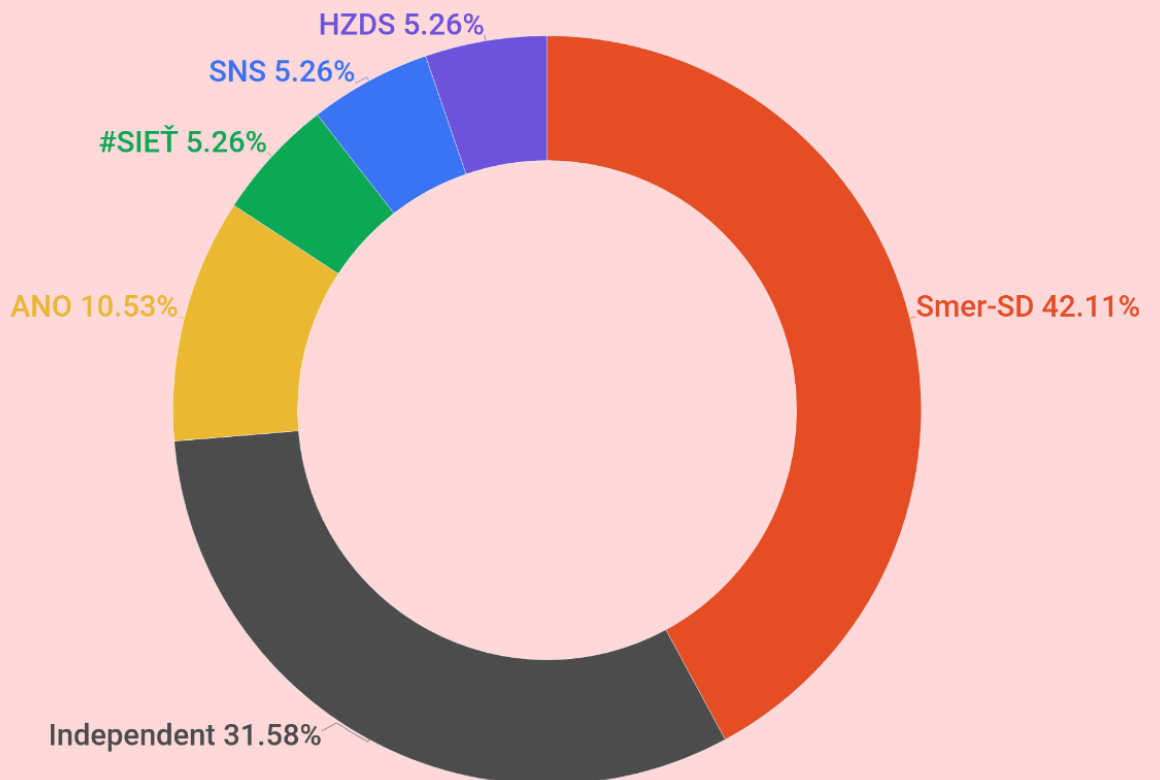
such a big role (albeit not insignificant one) in Slovak paradiplomacy towards China.

It must be noted, though, that in both Czechia and Slovakia, ČSSD and SMER-SD were dominating political forces on the regional and municipal level during the period when a majority of partnerships were established. This should be taken into account when evaluating the high share of social democratic governors and mayors in establishing partnerships with Chinese actors. Nevertheless, activities of the two parties on their respective national levels vis-à-vis China indicate a higher propensity to engage with China than among other political parties.

**Figure 7:** Political affiliations of Czech mayors/governors who signed cooperation documents with Chinese entities



**Figure 8:** Political affiliations of Slovak mayors/governors who signed cooperation documents with Chinese entities



## Business-Politics Cluster

Ties between China and Czechia and Slovakia, respectively, have been noted for the prominence of links to specific business and political actors.<sup>72</sup> Such an image is also supported by looking into the drivers of sub-national relations.

As in the other areas of the Czech-Chinese relationship, there is a cluster of business-political ties surrounding the push for developing sub-national relations.

The most important actor in this regard has been the Czech-China Chamber of Commerce, established in 2009. The Chamber has been notable for a high presence of former ČSSD politicians, as well as business leaders affiliated with the Czech PPF group of the richest Czech, Petr Kellner. The Chamber's chairman, Jiří Tvrdík, became one of the chief faces of the Czech-China business ties throughout the 'restart' period, with personal engagement in the flagship CEFC and, later, CITIC investment projects in the country.<sup>73</sup>

The Chamber's former chairman and current vice-chairman Jan Birke is a ČSSD mayor of Náchod town which cooperates with two Chinese cities, Kaifeng (Henan) and Jinhua (Zhejiang). The Chamber co-organized the above-mentioned 2012 AK ČR/ČSSD delegation to China and closely supported and cooperated on sub-national interactions via the annual Czech-China Investment forum, as well as other activities. During the pandemic, the Chamber was used as an intermediary for the PPE donations from the Zhejiang province.

In the city and region of Olomouc, the Czech-Slovak Chinese Chamber played a key role in mediating the establishment of partnerships with Chinese counterparts.<sup>74</sup> The Chamber has also cooperated with CPAFFC, in what the Chamber head Roman Spáčil called "a long-term positive cooperation" in his congratulatory letter to CPAFFC on the 100th anniversary of the founding of CCP.<sup>75</sup> At its beginning, the Chamber was given political auspices by ČSSD Senator Zdeněk Škromach and Senator František Čuba from the SPO party, which is close to President Miloš Zeman.<sup>76</sup> The Chamber has mediated the establishment of the representative office of the Olomouc region in

Fujian, which was headed by James Wu, a prominent member of the Chinese diaspora with high-level ties.<sup>77</sup>

Another noteworthy actor in this respect was the New Silk Road Institute Prague established by Jan Kohout, former ČSSD politician and foreign minister in two caretaker governments – in 2009-2010 and 2013-2014 – and again a deputy foreign minister in 2021.<sup>78</sup> Kohout also previously served as the first chairman of the Czech-China Chamber of Commerce. Former PM Petr Nečas from Civic Democratic Party (ODS) served as a member of the advisory board of the institute. In 2016, the Institute signed a cooperation agreement on participation in China's Belt and Road Initiative with the Czech Union of Towns and Municipalities (SMO).<sup>79</sup> The Central Bohemian Region rented the office space to the institute in Prague for a symbolic amount, as it was supposed to facilitate the contacts with the Sichuan province, a partner region of the Central Bohemian Region.<sup>80</sup> Conversely, another of Kohout's companies also facilitated the establishment and running of the representative office of the Central Bohemian Region in Chengdu.<sup>81</sup> Kohout's Silk Road Institute was closed in 2019, with Kohout citing a lack of interest on the side of Czech business, worsening bilateral ties, and the lack of clarity on the future development of BRI.<sup>82</sup> Kohout himself returned to high politics in 2020, as a Deputy Minister of Justice and later Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs.<sup>83</sup>

Yet, another politically connected organization involved in the promotion of local ties is the Czech-China-Center established in 2017 by Petr Petržílek, a former ČSSD minister and advisor to two Czech PMs (Paroubek, Sobotka). The Czech China Center was involved in facilitating visits in Czech cities and the organization of the first direct freight train from Czechia to Yiwu (Zhejiang Province).<sup>84</sup>

In Slovakia, the development of paradiplomatic links was linked to businessmen Ivan Čarnogurský and Eduard Šebo.

Ivan Čarnogurský, a relative of the founding members of the Christian Democratic Party (KDH), is the President of the development company IPEC Group and a General Manager of Friends of Hebei company. The

IPEC Group is the developer of the D1 Business Zone in Senec, Bratislava Region.<sup>85</sup> The business zone was initially presented in 2011 to also contain a 'European Chinese Centrum', which would serve to provide office space as well as a base of operations for various Chinese companies investing in Europe.<sup>86</sup> The project was co-financed by the Jiangsu Weitian Chemical Group, which invested 10 million EUR.<sup>87</sup> As of 2021, the project was not yet completed and the prospect of its future development is not clear.<sup>88</sup> At the same time, Čarnogurský has been a frequent visitor of China, where he has been promoting the D1 Business Zone as a potential destination for Chinese companies. His visits to the Liaoning Province or the Hebei Province and contacts with regional branches of CPAFFC were often publicized on local governments' websites.<sup>89</sup>

Possibly of more importance would be the activities of Eduard Šebo, Chairman of the United Industries company, as well as the Vice-president of the Slovak-Sino Chamber of Commerce (sic!). In early 2020, Šebo was involved in exporting a massive amount of PPE (personal protective equipment) to Cangzhou, where his wine-making company resides in China, to help the country deal with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>90</sup> Later on, when the pandemic hit Slovakia, United Industries sent a letter to the Slovak Prime Minister with the intent of mediating PPE supplies from Cangzhou to Slovakia.<sup>91</sup>

Based on the responses to our FOIA requests, Šebo and his companies have acted as drivers in developing relations between Nitra and Cangzhou. On the initiative of United Industries, the two cities signed a Letter of Intent on establishing friendship ties in 2018. However, there was no further cooperation between the two cities. United Industries representative and founder of Slovak China Business Center in Cangzhou Lü Pengan was involved in the establishment of ties between the town of Šurany (not part of our study) and Cangzhou in September 2021 at the China-CEEC SME Cooperation Forum.<sup>92</sup> Lü Pengan was also involved in arranging PPE supplies for the Trenčín Region.<sup>93</sup>

Furthermore, the Slovak-Sino Chamber of Commerce (sic!) was promoting cooperation between Trenčín and Qingdao in research and

innovation.<sup>94</sup> The Chamber has also been active in fostering relations with the China Council For The Promotion of International Trade (CCPIT), one of the key actors in paradiplomacy management on the Chinese side.<sup>95</sup>

In one case, management of paradiplomatic relations was outsourced to a businessperson with commercial interests in China. Košice and Wuhan signed a cooperation MoU in 2012. In 2021, Košice signed a mandate agreement with Igor Kolla, founder of ICT company Antik Telecom, to represent Košice in negotiations with Wuhan, intending to “renew and update the cooperation”. Antik Telecom has substantial commercial interests in China, where it owns a production facility in Dongguan (Guangdong Province).<sup>96</sup>

## Question of values

Cooperation with Chinese partners has often been controversial, not at least due to the conflicting political values that China represents and the related issues of human rights, treatment of minorities, and other problems. The negative image of China has mostly had an impact on the relationship with China in Czechia, whereas it has played a marginal role in Slovakia so far.

In Czechia, cooperation with Chinese partners has often faced criticism from the opposition parties in the cities and regions, which has grown over time with the fallout in the Czech-China relationship. The Prague-Beijing partnership in 2016 was panned by parties in the municipal assembly before its signing for being a political document rather than a basis for substantial cooperation. In the Central Bohemian region, opposition parties criticized the governor for giving undue attention to China in 2015, which they believed should be left to Czech government institutions. Moreover, the opposition representative claimed that “inspiration for how to govern the Central Bohemian Region effectively and well should not be sought in China, but rather in European states that have similar value orientations, where it works and citizens enjoy a good life.”<sup>97</sup> In Jihlava, an ODS representative argued against the memorandum with Wuhan in 2014, saying that a “memorandum that talks about understanding and

friendly cooperation is for me unacceptable in the case of the Chinese People's Republic. We are connected with China by year [19]89 when there was a student uprising in both countries. Here, it led to democratization and freedom, whereas in China it was brutally suppressed by the army."<sup>98</sup>

In the city and region of Pardubice, the opposition parties rallied against creating a partnership with Jilin in 2019, arguing against "a political partnership" with Chinese partners "in the spirit of humanistic ideals on which our Republic has been built in the post-revolution era".<sup>99</sup> Moreover, they claimed that "economic cooperation is in the stars, experience of other regions is negative" and that China is an "unreliable business partner". Furthermore, they cited the experience with the Prague-Beijing agreement, saying that it might be expected that Chinese negotiators would have political demands, including a subscription to the One China Principle or abandoning support for the Tibet cause. In Třebíč, which signed a cooperation agreement with Yichang in 2019, an opposition representative said the city should not be cooperating with "a country which is suppressing all freedom of speech and religion" and that Třebíč should instead conclude a partnership agreement with Taiwan.<sup>100</sup>

Apart from the Prague-Beijing agreement, no specific political declaration was found in other agreements signed between the Czech and Chinese partners. The agreements, however, often reference bilateral joint communique, which can be understood as an implicit reference to adherence to the One China Policy. Agreements often generally state that cooperation is based on mutual benefit, respect, and equality in line with Chinese diplomatic rhetoric. An interesting case to ponder is the cryptic reference to "respecting the foreign policy and relevant laws of the foreign policy of the People's Republic of China" in the memorandum of cooperation between the small town of Varnsdorf and the Jiedong District (Jieyang). The signed document is different from the version approved by the city assembly, where the contentious language on respecting Chinese laws and foreign policy was absent,<sup>101</sup> making the signed version of the agreement potentially invalid.



In Slovakia, a similar potentially problematic clause was identified in the Žilina-Changchun agreement, in which the parties agreed to “observe the principles of mutual respect and seek common ground while reserving judgment and non-interference in each other’s internal affairs.” A similar stipulation doesn’t appear in any other Slovak city’s or region’s agreement. The inclusion of the ‘non-interference’ clause points to attempts at avoiding the aforementioned tensions over sensitive issues. This was to be expected in the context of the post-1989 developments. What sets Žilina apart from Prague would be that the Prague-Beijing agreement’s clause explicitly invoked Prague’s commitment to the One China policy, going much further than mere ‘non-interference’. Some documents signed by Slovak sub-national entities also include a reference to the Joint communique establishing diplomatic relations, a document that commits Slovakia to uphold the One China Principle, and permits maintaining only economic relations with Taiwan that are initiated by the private sector.<sup>102</sup>

One particular issue where sub-national entities have been involved in the larger issues of foreign policy is the question of Tibet. The Flag for Tibet event has seen the participation of Czech sub-national governments since 1996. Out of the Czech regions and Prague, every single one except for Vysočina participated in the event at least once. In 2021, the number of participating local governments reached 827. While overall data across countries is not available, Czechia appears to be one of the most involved countries in this regard - e.g. in Germany, only more than 400 sub-national governments participated in 2021.<sup>103</sup>

The Chinese Embassy has regularly criticized the involvement of Czech local governments in the Flag for Tibet event, saying that the moves by city governments are in contradiction with the official Czech foreign policy.<sup>104</sup> It has also tried to influence the governments not to participate, via letters or invitations for talks, where the “correct version” of the situation and history of Tibet were explained.<sup>105</sup> Such efforts to enact political demands have also touched upon the Taiwan issue. For example, in Prague 6 District, the Chinese Embassy has regularly tried to convince the local government to change the name of the annual “Embassy day” event it organized where the Taiwanese

Economic and Cultural Office was also invited, as it implied its status as an embassy.<sup>106</sup>

The (non)participation of local governments in the annual event has been closely followed in the Czech media and was often hotly debated in the regional and municipal assemblies and councils. In some cases, the decision was made by the local assemblies against the wishes of the mayor (e.g. in Náchod).<sup>107</sup> Apart from the desire to stay clear of political issues that should not be addressed by sub-national governments and technical issues, the common argument raised against raising the Tibetan flag was a potential danger to bilateral relations and, especially, economic ties. In some cities, the leadership has even consulted companies based in the region with business interests in China about the decision.<sup>108</sup> In Jablonec nad Nisou, the city council decided not to fly the flag in 2012, citing the interest of local businesses and desire not to threaten the relationship with the Chinese partner Beihai that the city concluded shortly before.<sup>109</sup> In the South Moravian Region, the practice of raising the Tibetan Flag was stopped during the term of Governor Michal Hašek (ČSSD) when it developed partnerships with several Chinese partners. In Prague, it was halted during the ANO-led government. However, in many regions/cities, the participation in the event continued even while developing cooperation with Chinese partners, e.g. in Třebíč. We have not encountered any evidence about direct repercussions from the Chinese side for the flying of the flag.

Slovak cities and regions are generally much less interested in the event, with only 26 cities, towns or municipalities having ever participated in the event. The media attention is also on a much lower level than in Czechia. The tradition only started in the country in 2010, when Bratislava Region, capital city Bratislava, and its Old Town and Petržalka districts participated in the event.<sup>110</sup> There have also been cases of cities with already established links with China supporting this event. For example, Žilina, whose 1992 partnership agreement with Changchun includes a non-interference clause, has been one of the cities that decided to participate in the Flag for Tibet event in March 2021.<sup>111</sup> Lučenec, which signed a memorandum on cooperation with Europe and China Friendly Chamber of Hong Kong,

and Trnava Region, which has a cooperation agreement with Hainan province, have also participated in the event.<sup>112</sup>

The Flag for Tibet event serves well to portray the significant differences between Slovakia and Czechia when it comes to China and associated human rights considerations. It shows that the realities of sub-national governments of regional and city levels largely mirror those of the national governments. While in Czechia the question of how to approach China has been one of the determining points in the political landscape, this sentiment has largely been avoided in Slovakia. Thus, politicians on the national as well as sub-national levels in Slovakia rarely took a stand on this issue, which also lacks much political meaning in the domestic debate, leading to a much lesser interest as such. However, this seems to have started to change lately.

## 5. Case studies in sub-national relations with China

### Martin: City, region, and 16+1 in the same lane?

**Slovak entity** | Martin, Žilina Region

**Chinese entity** | Ningbo, Zhejiang Province

**Establishment** | 2014

**Form** | Agreement on the Establishment of Friendly Relations

The relations between the cities of Martin and Ningbo began in 2014 when, following the initial impulse from the side of the Žilina Region, where Martin is located, an agreement was signed. The aforementioned region also had a previously signed agreement with the Zhejiang region in which Ningbo lies, thus showing the interconnected nature of paradiplomatic relations on regional and municipal levels. Outside of relations with China, it is not usual for regions to play a significant role in establishing ties on the municipal level and the communication is most commonly held between the partnering cities themselves.

The relationship is based on the 'Agreement on the Establishment of Friendly Relations' but based on our interviews, Ningbo supposedly perceives it to be closer to the level of Partner Cities. The differences in the perceived status point to a different perception in the importance of or the formality given to the agreements establishing paradiplomatic relations.

The initial signing of the agreement was coupled with an official visit from Zhejiang in 2014, a visit that was an extension of a visit to the Žilina Region. Following this, officials and businesspeople from Martin

and Žilina Region were invited to the China-CEEC (16+1) Trade and Investment Expo in Ningbo. Expo visits were to continue yearly until 2020 when they were interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Visits from Ningbo to Martin were generally less frequent, happening every 2-3 years, being tied to visits from Zhejiang to Žilina Region and the 16+1 cooperation.

Generally, the results of paradiplomatic ties are hard to precisely pin down. In this case, however, we can say that the ties between Martin and Ningbo have helped to increase tourism in the city. Due to these ties, the city of Martin has been visited by approximately 1,000 visitors from Ningbo yearly, totaling about 4,000 visits between 2015 to 2019. This trend was halted by the pandemic in 2020 and it remains to be seen whether it will be renewed after the pandemic. Based on interviews, these visits were at least in part sponsored by Ningbo, which supports its citizens in their travels to its partner cities in Europe. Other outcomes of the ties were supposed to result in the form of elementary school exchange visits, which however didn't fully take shape due to the ongoing pandemic. In 2020, Martin was also offered a shipment of PPE by Ningbo, which was, however, refused due to full stocks on the side of Martin.

In the wake of the pandemic, the intercity ties have been severely hurt. However, both cities seem to be interested in reestablishing them, with Ningbo inviting officials from Martin to the online 2021 China-CEEC Mayor's forum.

When it comes to the politicization of this relationship, Martin did not perceive any adverse activities on part of Ningbo, which would aim at promoting Chinese views on contentious political issues. Generally, the ties seem to express themselves in economic and cultural dimensions. However, what seems to be of note is the way the visits and conferences, in respect to the Martin-Ningbo relationship, are generally tied to interactions between Zhejiang province-Žilina Region and more widely the 16+1 format, pointing to a more centralized approach in this relationship from the Chinese side, even if in their communication with Martin, the main focus is on highlighting Ningbo's supposed independence.

## Prague: High politics meets paradiplomacy

**Czech entity** | Prague

**Chinese entity** | Guandong | Shanghai | Beijing

**Establishment** | 2013 | 2016 | 2017

**Form** | Joint Memorandum on Cooperation Development (Guangzhou)  
Agreement on Establishing Sister city Relations (Shanghai)  
Agreement on Establishing Sister city Relations (Beijing)

Prague has been one of the most significant actors in Czech paradiplomacy with China, where the political nature of the relationship was most exposed.

Interest in formal cooperation with Chinese counterparts was sparked after the restart of Sino-Czech relations. In 2013, Prague signed an MoU with Guangzhou, followed by sister city agreements with Beijing (2016) and Shanghai (2017) The highpoint of cooperation occurred under the leadership of Mayor Andrea Krnáčová in a coalition of ANO, ČSSD, and other smaller parties.

According to Prague officials, Shanghai was the primary target that the city was interested in cooperating with, due to its position as a key economic and technological hub. The relationship with Beijing was seen mostly as a prerequisite political step, given the symbolic role of the capital. Only then could the relationship with Shanghai be developed. Prague and its Chinese partners intended to cooperate on culture, tourism, smart cities, and other areas. Direct flights between Prague, and Beijing and Shanghai commenced in 2015 and 2016 respectively, although there was no direct involvement of the city level.

One of the most substantial areas of cooperation was the mutual training of medical staff with both Shanghai and Beijing. However, the exchange of know-how was deemed to be mostly unilateral, flowing from the Czech side to China. Due to the sponsorship of Home Credit, it was also seen as partly a PR exercise of a private company.<sup>113</sup> In the case of Beijing, a symbol of cooperation was to be a lease of a panda for Prague Zoo, based on the broader cooperation between Prague

and Beijing Zoos. However, despite repeated attempts, the lease didn't happen. This was allegedly due to the lack of direct involvement of President Zeman, who was supposed to ask for the panda on a high political level.<sup>114</sup>

Prague city officials claimed that while the actual scope of cooperation with Beijing and Shanghai was limited, it might have been simply because it did not have the chance to develop over the short time frame before the new city government was formed in late 2018 and the controversial issue of renegotiating the One China Policy clause was brought up.

In the Prague-Beijing agreement, article 3 stated that "Prague, in accordance with the Czech Government, continues to adhere to One China Policy, just as it recognizes Taiwan as an inseparable part of Chinese territory". One possibility why the pledge was included is that Prague has had a memorandum of cooperation with Taipei since 2001, which would make this action fall in line with CPAFFC regulations (see Chapter 1). However, there is no other known case of a sister city agreement that involved such a pledge and it did not even appear in a later agreement with Shanghai, signed in 2017, nor was it included in the previous MoU signed with Guangzhou. The clause was a point of contention at the time, causing a heated debate in the Prague assembly.<sup>115</sup>

The new city leadership under Pirates Mayor Zdeněk Hřib from 2018 argued that the issue of the One China Policy should not have been included in the city agreement at all, as it concerns issues of foreign policy, while city partnerships should remain apolitical. However, from taking issue with the single clause, Hřib also made more moves on issues seen as sensitive by China. This included renewing the practice of flying the Tibetan flag at the City Hall, meeting with Tibetan leader in exile Lobsang Sangay, and meeting with Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen during his Taiwan trip.<sup>116</sup> Hřib also renewed Prague's cooperation with Taipei, which was first started already in 2001. In general, Hřib repeatedly stressed his criticism of China and support for human rights and democracy in the 'Havelian' legacy of Czech foreign policy.<sup>117</sup>

Prague has signaled its request to renegotiate the partnership agreement but it was rebuffed by Beijing, which later stopped responding to communication attempts at all. The Chinese Embassy was said to be actively involved in the process of communication with Beijing. Interviewed officials have pointed out that this has reflected the fact that while Prague was acting as an independent actor, it faced the whole apparatus of the Chinese state on the other side.

Even before moving to revoke the agreement, Prague faced repeating warnings from Chinese officials. Moreover, there were already some countermeasures taken against Prague, such as cancellation or postponement of the planned tours in China of Prague-affiliated musical ensembles.<sup>118</sup>

Prague City Council decided to terminate the agreement on 7 October 2019, pending a vote in the City Assembly. However, before the motion was voted on, Beijing proactively announced the termination of the relationship the very same day, citing Prague's "wrong moves and improper comments on issues related to Taiwan and Tibet."<sup>119</sup> Shanghai moved to cancel the relationship with Prague as well on 14 January 2020, shortly after Prague signed a sister city partnership with Taipei.<sup>120</sup> This was a highly unusual move on part of Shanghai, as previous research shows that at least 71 municipal pairings in which a town maintains relations with both Chinese and Taiwanese municipalities exist.<sup>121</sup>

According to the Prague city officials, there was no communication from the last remaining Chinese partner of Prague, Guangzhou, after the political controversy. This can be attributed to the fact that the relationship was only based on a memorandum and ties were dormant even before, so there was no need to issue an official proclamation on the side of Guangzhou. However, quite curiously, Prague seems to have been deleted from the list of international partner cities of Guangzhou on the official website, with a blank space left in the table.<sup>122</sup>

Prague officials do not see any potential of developing ties with Chinese partners in the near future. Instead, Prague is focusing on its



ties with Taipei, where the relationship has been called “extraordinarily” active, especially for such geographically distant partners.

**Figure 9:** Screenshot of Guangzhou’s list of partner cities. Row 15, now redacted, originally included information about the partnership with Prague.

13.	休斯敦	美国	2012.04.09
14.	米兰	意大利	2012.07.25
15.			2013.04.25
16.	平阳 (省)	越南	2013.08.22

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# Appendix 1: List of studied municipalities and regions

## **Czech regions:**

The Capital City of Prague, South Moravian Region, Hradec Králové Region, Karlovy Vary Region, Central Bohemian Region, Olomouc Region, Pardubice Region, Plzeň Region, Liberec Region, Zlín Region, Vysočina Region, South Bohemian Region, Ústí nad Labem Region, Moravian-Silesian Region

## **Czech municipalities:**

Aš, Benešov, Beroun, Bílina, Bílovec, Blansko, Blatná, Blovice, Bohumín, Boskovice, Brandýs nad Labem-Stará Boleslav, Břeclav, Brno, Broumov, Bruntál, Bučovice, Bystřice nad Pernštejnem, Bystřice pod Hostýnem, Cheb, Chomutov, Chotěboř, Chrudim, Čáslav, Černošice, Česká Lípa, Česká Třebová, České Budějovice, Český Brod, Český Krumlov, Český Těšín, Dačice, Děčín, Dobříš, Dobruška, Domažlice, Dvůr Králové nad Labem, Frenštát pod Radhoštěm, Frýdek-Místek, Frýdlant, Frýdlant nad Ostravicí, Havířov, Havlíčkův Brod, Hlinsko, Hlučín, Hodonín, Holešov, Holice, Horažďovice, Hořice, Hořovice, Horšovský Týn, Hradec Králové, Hranice, Humpolec, Hustopeče, Ivančice, Jablonec nad Nisou, Jablunkov, Jaroměř, Jeseník, Jičín, Jihlava, Jilemnice, Jindřichův Hradec, Kadaň, Kaplice, Karlovy Vary, Karviná, Kladno, Klatovy, Kolín, Konice, Kopřivnice, Kostelec nad Orlicí, Kralovice, Kralupy nad Vltavou, Kraslice, Kravaře, Králíky, Krnov, Kroměříž, Kuřim, Kutná Hora, Kyjov, Lanškroun, Liberec, Lipník nad Bečvou, Litoměřice, Litomyšl, Litovel, Litvínov, Louny, Lovosice, Luhačovice, Lysá nad Labem, Mariánské Lázně, Mělník, Mikulov, Milevsko, Mladá Boleslav, Mnichovo Hradiště, Mohelnice, Moravská Třebová, Moravské Budějovice, Moravský Krumlov, Most, Náchod, Náměšť nad Oslavou, Nepomuk, Neratovice, Nová Paka, Nové Město na Moravě, Nové Město nad Metují, Nový Bor, Nový Bydžov, Nový Jičín, Nymburk, Nýřany, Odry, Olomouc, Opava, Orlová, Ostrava, Ostrov, Otrokovice,

Pacov, Pardubice, Pelhřimov, Písek, Plzeň, Podbořany, Poděbrady, Pohořelice, Polička, Prachatice, Přelouč, Přerov, Přeštice, Příbram, Prostějov, Rakovník, Říčany, Rokycany, Rosice, Roudnice nad Labem, Rožnov pod Radhoštěm, Rumburk, Rychnov nad Kněžnou, Rýmařov, Sedlčany, Semily, Slaný, Slavkov u Brna, Soběslav, Sokolov, Stod, Strakonice, Stříbro, Sušice, Světlá nad Sázavou, Svitavy, Šlapanice, Šternberk, Šumperk, Tachov, Tanvald, Tábor, Telč, Teplice, Tišnov, Třebíč, Třeboň, Trhové Sviny, Třinec, Trutnov, Turnov, Týn nad Vltavou, Uherské Hradiště, Uherský Brod, Uničov, Ústí nad Labem, Ústí nad Orlicí, Valašské Klobouky, Valašské Meziříčí, Varnsdorf, Velké Meziříčí, Veselí nad Moravou, Vimperk, Vítkov, Vizovice, Vlašim, Vodňany, Votice, Vrchlabí, Vsetín, Vysoké Mýto, Vyškov, Zábřeh, Zlín, Znojmo, Žamberk, Žatec, Žďár nad Sázavou, Železný Brod, Židlochovice, Prague 1, Prague 2, Prague 3, Prague 4, Prague 5, Prague 6, Prague 7, Prague 8, Prague 9, Prague 10, Prague 11, Prague 12, Prague 13, Prague 14, Prague 15, Prague 16, Prague 17, Prague 18, Prague 19, Prague 20, Prague 21, Prague 22

### **Slovak regions:**

Banská Bystrica Region, Bratislava Region, Košice Region, Nitra Region, Prešov Region, Trenčín Region, Trnava Region, Žilina Region

### **Slovak municipalities:**

Bánovce nad Bebravou, Banská Bystrica, Banská Štiavnica, Bardejov, Bratislava, Bratislava-Čunovo, Bratislava-Devín, Bratislava-Devínska Nová Ves, Bratislava-Dúbravka, Bratislava-Jarovce, Bratislava-Karlová Ves, Bratislava-Lamač, Bratislava-Nové Mesto, Bratislava-Rusovce, Bratislava-Petržalka, Bratislava-Podunajské Biskupice, Bratislava-Rača, Bratislava-Ružinov, Bratislava-Staré Mesto, Bratislava-Vajnory, Bratislava-Vrakuňa, Bratislava-Záhorská Bystrica, Brezno, Bytča, Čadca, Detva, Dolný Kubín, Dunajská Streda, Galanta, Gelnica, Hlohovec, Humenné, Ilava, Kežmarok, Komárno, Košice, Košice-Barca, Košice-Dargovských Hrdinov, Košice-Džungla, Košice-Juh, Košice-Kavečany, Košice-Košická Nová Ves, Košice-Krásna, Košice-Lorinčík, Košice-Luník IX, Košice-Myslava, Košice-Nad Jazerom, Košice-Pereš, Košice-Polov, Košice-Šaca, Košice-Sebastovce, Košice-Sever, Košice-Sídlisko KVP, Košice-Sídlisko Ťahanovce, Košice-Vyšné Opátske, Košice-Západ, Krupina, Kysucké Nové Mesto, Levice, Levoča, Liptovský Mikuláš, Lučenec, Malacky,

Medzilaborce, Michalovce, Myjava, Námestovo, Nitra, Nové Mesto nad Váhom, Partizánske, Pezinok, Piešťany, Poltár, Poprad, Považská Bystrica, Prešov, Prievidza, Púchov, Revúca, Rimavská Sobota, Rožňava, Ružomberok, Sabinov, Šaľa, Senec, Senica, Skalica, Snina, Sobrance, Spišská Nová Ves, Stará Ľubovňa, Stropkov, Svidník, Topoľčany, Trebišov, Trenčín, Trnava, Turčianske Teplice, Tvrdošín, Veľký Krtíš, Vranov nad Topľou, Zlaté Moravce, Zvolen, Žarnovica, Žiar nad Hronom, Žilina

## Appendix 2: List of existing paradiplomatic relations

<b>CZECHIA</b>				
<b>Czech entity</b>	<b>Chinese entity</b>	<b>Cooperation Level</b>	<b>Establishment<sup>v</sup></b>	<b>Termination / Expiration</b>
Bohumín	Jiangyin	MoU/Lol	2008	
Central Bohemian Region	Sichuan Province	agreement	2005/2015	
Central Bohemian Region	Henan Province	MoU/Lol	2014	
Central Bohemian Region	Changhong company	agreement	2015	
Haviřov	Gulou District (Nanjing)	MoU/Lol	2015	
Hradec Králové Region	Miyun District (Beijing)	MoU/Lol	2008	
Hradec Králové Region	Chongqing	MoU/Lol	2014	
Jablonec	Beihai	agreement	2011/2012	
Jihlava	Wuhan	MoU/Lol	2017	
Karlovy Vary Region	Hebei Province	MoU/Lol	2014	
Karlovy Vary Region	Changping District (Beijing)	MoU/Lol	2007	
Karviná	Kaili	MoU/Lol	2016	
Kladno	Ningbo	MoU/Lol	2015	
Liberec	Shijiazhuang	MoU/Lol	2016	
Mariánské Lázně	Xicheng District (Beijing)	MoU/Lol	2016	
Moravian Silesian Region	Jiangsu Province	agreement	2013/2016	
Moravian Silesian Region	Hebei Province	agreement	2015/2016	
Moravian Silesian Region	Qiqihar	MoU/Lol	2017	
Náchod	Kaifeng	MoU/Lol	2019	
Náchod	Jinhua	MoU/Lol	2013	
Nymburk	Changhong company	MoU/Lol	2006	
Nymburk	Mianyang	MoU/Lol	2014	

<sup>v</sup> When two years are recorded, the earlier of the two denotes the year when a memorandum of understanding or a letter of intent were signed, following which a cooperation agreement was signed.

Olomouc	Kunming	agreement	2017	
Olomouc Region	Yunnan Province	agreement	2014/2015	
Olomouc Region	Fujian Province	agreement	2014/2017	
Ostrava	Suzhou	agreement	2015	2020 (exp)**vi
Pardubice Region	Jilin Province	MoU/LoI	2019	
Plzeň Region	Zhejiang Province	agreement	2005/2007	
Prague	Beijing	agreement	2016	2019 (term)
Prague	Shanghai	agreement	2015/2017	2020 (term)
Prague	Guangzhou	MoU/LoI	2013	
Prague 1 District	Chaoyang District (Beijing)	MoU/LoI	2015/2017	
Prague 1 District	Xihu District (Hangzhou)	MoU/LoI	2014	
Prague 1 District	Changning District (Shanghai)	MoU/LoI	2016	
Prague 15 District	Jinan	MoU/LoI	2014	
Prague 5 District	Panyu District (Guangzhou)	MoU/LoI	2015	
Prague 8 District	Fengtai District (Beijing)	MoU/LoI	2016	2019 (term)
South Bohemian Region	Tianjin	MoU/LoI	2014	
South Bohemian Region	Henan Province	MoU/LoI	2014	
South Moravian Region	Guangdong Province	agreement	2014/2016	
South Moravian Region	Hebei Province	agreement	2015/2016	
South Moravian Region	China Development Bank Corporation	agreement	2016	2019 (exp)
South Moravian Region	Shanxi Province	MoU/LoI	2018	
South Moravian Region	Hainan Province	agreement	2014/2016	
South Moravian Region	Cangzhou	MoU/LoI	2016	2019 (exp)
Třebíč	Yichang	agreement	2019	
Ústí nad Labem	Yiwu	MoU/LoI	2015	
Ústí nad Labem Region	Anhui Province	agreement	2009/2010	2020 (term)
Varnsdorf	Jiedong District (Jieyang)	MoU/LoI	2017	
Vysočina	Hubei Province	MoU/LoI	2014	2021 (term)
Zlín	Cangzhou	MoU/LoI	2016	
Zlín Region	Shandong Province	agreement	2006/2007	
Zlín Region	Shenyang	agreement	2008/2010	
Zlín Region	Liaoning Province	agreement	2017/2017	

vi The cooperation agreement was concluded for 5 years, with an automatic prolongation sans explicit termination by any party. Nevertheless, Ostrava contacted Suzhou with a proposal for an explicit extension of the agreement. As there was no response from Suzhou, Ostrava deems the relationship to have ceased existing. Suzhou does not list Ostrava as its partner on its website as well.

<b>SLOVAK REPUBLIC</b>			
<b>Slovak entity</b>	<b>Chinese entity</b>	<b>Cooperation Level</b>	<b>Establishment<sup>*vii</sup></b>
Bratislava Region	Shanghai	agreement	2003/2003
Brezno	Dengfeng	MoU/LoI	2019
Brezno	Songshan Shaolin temple	MoU/LoI	2019
Košice	Wuhan	MoU/LoI	2012
Lučenec	Europe China Friendly Chamber of Hong kong	MoU/LoI	2017
Martin	Ningbo	agreement	2014
Nitra	Cangzhou	MoU/LoI	2018
Nitra	Xianning	MoU/LoI	2018
Piešťany	Xicheng District (Beijing)	agreement	2014/2016
Prešov Region	Hebei Province	MoU/LoI	2016
Prievidza	Changsha	MoU/LoI	2016
Spišská Nová Ves	Tongzhou District (Beijing)	agreement	2015/2016
Trnava Region	Hainan Province	agreement	2009
Žiar nad Hronom	Zibo	agreement	2001
Žilina	Changchun	agreement	1992
Žilina Region	Zhejiang Province	agreement	2012

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<sup>vii</sup> When two years are recorded, the earlier of the two denotes the year when a memorandum of understanding or a letter of intent were signed, following which a cooperation agreement was signed.

## Appendix 3: PPE donations

CZECHIA				
Direction	Donor	Recipient	Donated material	Formal partnership
CN-CZ	Changhong company	Central Bohemian Region	200 000 masks 20 000 N95 400 protective suits	YES
CN-CZ	Changhong company	Nymburk	2 000 masks	YES
CN-CZ	Chinese diaspora	Třebíč	10 000 masks 200 N95 120 goggles	x
CN-CZ	Chinese Embassy	Hodonín	6000 masks 90 suits	x
CN-CZ	Dahua Technology company	Ústí nad Labem	3000 masks 1 camera	x
CN-CZ	Guangdong Province	South Moravian Region	80 000 masks 20 000 gloves	YES
CN-CZ	Guiyang	Mariánské Lázně	10 000 masks	YES
CN-CZ	Hainan Province	South Moravian Region	4800 respirators 300 suits	YES
CN-CZ	Hebei Province	South Moravian Region	500 suits 5000 respirators	YES
CN-CZ	Hunan Province	Pilsen Region	6 400 masks	x
CN-CZ	Jilin Province	Pardubice Region	25 000 masks	YES
CN-CZ	Jincheng	Ministry of Interior/Moravian Silesian Region	30 000 masks 50 000 masks	YES (Province relationship)
CN-CZ	Kaifeng	Náchod	20 000 masks	YES
CN-CZ	Minhang (Shanghai)	Šumperk	10 000 masks	YES (in process)
CN-CZ	Zhejiang Province	Czech-China Chamber of Commerce	100 000 masks 20 000 N9k masks 2000 protective suits	YES



Direction	Donor	Recipient	Donated material	Formal partnership
			2000 shoe covers	
CN-CZ	Zall Foundation company (Wuhan)	Vysočina Region	PPE worth 6 300 000 CZK	YES (Wuhan)
CZ-CN	Central Bohemian Region	Sichuan Province	20 500 masks	YES
CZ-CN	Karlovy Vary Region	?	PPE worth 100 000 CZK	?
CZ-CN	Liberec Region	Zhejiang Province (via AK ČR)	PPE worth 200 000 CZK	x
CZ-CN	Moravian Silesian Region	Jiangsu, Shanxi Province	PPE worth 400 000 CZK*part of the shipment was rejected by China as it was no longer needed	YES
CZ-CN	Olomouc Region	Kunming	PPE worth 20 000 CZK	YES
CZ-CN	Ostrava	Suzhou	PPE worth 300 000, *offer rejected as it was no longer needed	YES
CZ-CN	Pardubice Region	Jilin Province	PPE worth 150 000 CZK	YES
CZ-CN	South Moravian Region	Hebei Province	700 respirators (worth ca 350 000 CZK)	YES
CZ-CN	South Moravian Region	Hainan Province	700 respirators (worth ca 350 000 CZK)	YES
CZ-CN	South Moravian Region	Guangdong Province	700 respirators (worth ca 350 000 CZK)	YES
CZ-CN	Třebíč	Yichang	PPE worth 50 000 CZK	YES
CZ-CN	Vysočina Region	Yichang	PPE worth 50 000 CZK	YES

## SLOVAKIA

Direction	Donor	Recipient	Donated material	Formal partnership
CN-SK	Cangzhou	Slovakia	unknown	*
CN-SK	Changchun	Žilina	30 000 masks	YES
CN-SK	Tongzhou District (Beijing), Jing'an District (Shanghai)	Spišská Nová Ves	unknown quantity	YES
CN-SK	Shanghai	Bratislava Region	21 000 respirators	YES

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The Central European Institute of Asian Studies (CEIAS) is an independent think tank based in Bratislava (Slovakia) and with branches in Olomouc (Czechia) and Vienna (Austria).

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## Under the radar: Mapping the Czech and Slovak local governments' ties to China

**Authors:** Matej Šimalčík, Filip Šebok, Adam Kalivoda, Veronika Blablová

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