



SELECTED FINDINGS FROM RELATIONSHIP RESEARCH AND COOPERATION BETWEEN CZECH ACADEMIC INSTITUTIONS AND ENTITIES FROM THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

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REPORT

EUROPEAN VALUES CENTER FOR SECURITY POLICY _____

The European Values Security Center for Security Policy is a non-governmental think tank defending freedom and sovereignty. We protect liberal democracy, the rule of law and the transatlantic alliance of the Czech Republic. We help strengthen Europe, especially against the hostile influence of Russia and China.

Our vision is of a free, secure and prosperous Czech Republic in Central Europe, an integral part of the transatlantic community and based on a strong alliance with the United States.

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INTRODUCTION

In recent months, the European Values Security Centre has carried out extensive research on relations and cooperation between Czech universities and universities (or other entities in general) from the People's Republic of China (PRC). This research was part of the international project "China-Europe Academic Engagement Tracker", which was simultaneously conducted in 11 European countries under the leadership of the Slovak think tank, the Central European Institute of Asian Studies (CEIAS).

WHY DO WE CONSIDER THE EXPANSION OF PRC INFLUENCE IN CZECH UNIVERSITIES A SECURITY THREAT?

The Chinese state's efforts to acquire technology and expand its influence in academia are a central part of its long-term strategy of influence and espionage operations. It is a global, organized and consistent campaign. It is an activity to which significant financial and personnel resources are devoted in the PRC, and a number of agencies have been created specifically for this purpose.

People from the highest levels of the communist apparatus, including the Politburo itself, are involved in its management and supervision. At the same time, China's abuse of cooperation with Western universities is fundamentally linked to the officially announced and highly ambitious initiatives of the current PRC leadership. President Xi Jinping has in the past announced an initiative for the so-called *fusion of the military and civilian spheres* and personally oversees the Commission for its development. This initiative aims precisely to integrate civilian innovation and research into military development, while also blurring the distinction between civilian and military universities. As a result, it is now not only possible to identify universities linked to the military industry as those officially under the Chinese military, but also those that appear at first sight to be civilian universities.¹

Combined with the total state control of Chinese academic institutions, it is clear that uncontrolled cooperation between Czech and Chinese universities poses a great danger.

HOW WAS THE RESEARCH CONDUCTED?

Our investigation was methodologically based primarily on the processing of completed questionnaires sent to universities in accordance with Act No. 106/1999 Coll. (Act on Free Access to Information) in combination with the use of the OSINT method (open source data retrieval), where a detailed analysis of information from the public register of contracts of

¹ Please see the following links for details on the topic:
<https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/02/05/dont-underestimate-chinas-military-civil-fusion-efforts/>
<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/china/american-universities-are-soft-target-china-s-spies-say-u-n1104291>
<https://www.thestar.com/opinion/contributors/2018/11/12/chinas-silent-invasion-of-western-universities.html>



the Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic was used. *The China Defence Universities Tracker*, a database of Chinese institutions engaged in military or security science and technology research, was then applied to determine the riskiness of individual Chinese institutions and to find out details of their activities in Chinese military research. It was created by the International Cyber Policy Centre of the Australian think tank ASPI. It is the most prestigious and detailed database in existence in this area.

CONCLUSION

Our research included a total of 26 Czech public universities and nearly 50 research institutes of the Czech Academy of Sciences, 12 of which did not respond to the Act 106 request or requested payment for “costs associated with obtaining the requested information” (the highest request was 41,000 CZK). After data analysis, the following was found:

- **193 collaborations** with **145 PRC entities** at various levels (including companies, special zones and government agencies in addition to universities).
- A total of **17 universities and 4 research institutes** have some level of official cooperation with a Chinese higher education institution included in the ASPI *China Defence University Tracker*'s list of risk schools linked to the defence sector, which amounts to **more than half of all Czech universities**.
- Together, relationships with Chinese risk-takers account for more than **a quarter of all cooperation**. Almost all of these relationships take the form of cooperation agreements, exchange agreements or memoranda of understanding.

Among the most significant findings of our research is the cooperation between Czech universities and Chinese entities with proven ties to the Chinese military industry or those that are part of China's official propaganda and influence machine. An overview of the surveyed universities and findings is available on the [“China-Europe Academic Engagement Tracker”](#) project website.

A list of practical recommendations on how to prevent threats from Chinese influence on Czech universities follows, taking into account good practices in other countries.



LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Amendment to the Higher Education Act

This should include an obligation to issue a public annual report once a year on all income received by universities and their staff for activities related to work for the university from abroad (i.e. from individuals and legal entities from outside the EU).

- An example is the US *Stop Espionage and Theft in Higher Education Act* of 2018/21, which does not mention China by name but is a clear attempt to give US law enforcement more tools to deal with the expansion of the Chinese Communist Party into US educational institutions.
- This law was written to create a threshold for universities in terms of the amount of foreign financial contributions that must be reported by law, at \$50,000 from \$250,000 (the original 1965 law where twice yearly reporting is required, Section 117).²
- It also requires the disclosure of foreign gifts and contracts by higher education institutions, including the corresponding market value of any in-kind gifts.³

2. Establish a system of certification by the Ministry of Education for studies or research in certain sensitive technological fields

All foreign students from non-EU countries studying sensitive subjects at Czech universities will have to obtain certification in a process whereby the host university consults their applications with the **Working Group of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Education**.

In the second phase of the process, the university receives a non-binding recommendation from the Working Group and then decides whether to grant certification.

An existing summary issued by the Financial Analytical Office of the Czech Republic (FAU) as part of the sanctions against Russia and Belarus, which aims to prevent the studies of students from these countries (and other countries under long-term Western sanctions), can be used as a guide to create a list of at-risk university majors.

2 Section 117 of the Higher Education Act of 1965 - <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/highered/leg/foreign-gifts.html>

3 Stop Higher Education Espionage and Theft Act of 2018 - <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/6821?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%5B%22Health%2C+Education%2C+Labor%2C+and+Pensions%22%5D%7D&s=1&r=15>
Stop Higher Education Espionage and Theft Act of 2021
- <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/senate-bill/676/text>
United States Innovation and Competition Act of 2021 - <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/4521>



Specifically, these are programs whose study could be exploited to accelerate Chinese military research.

List of higher education disciplines at increased risk for providing technical assistance or intangible technology transfer, FAU 2021⁴

- Biotechnology
- Electrical Engineering
- Energy
- Energy and fuel
- Physics
- Chemistry and Biochemistry
- Information and Communication Technologies
- Engineering
- Nuclear disciplines (including e.g. Nuclear Chemistry, Nuclear Technology)
- Aerospace
- Aviation
- Nanotechnology and Nanomaterials
- Process Engineering
- Materials Technology

There are currently a number of foreign models for such a system. For example, the British version: **The Academic Technology Approval Scheme (ATAS)**:

- Students and researchers who are nationals of the EU, the European Economic Area (EEA), Australia, Canada, Japan, New Zealand, Singapore, South Korea, Switzerland or the United States of America do not need an ATAS certificate. Researchers and students of all other nationalities must apply for an ATAS certificate.
- Obtaining an ATAS certificate is a prerequisite for these students to obtain a visa.

Another model is the Dutch vetting system:

- The Dutch government is working on a screening framework to prevent unwanted knowledge and technology transfer. This involves screening people who wish to gain access to those areas of knowledge where the risks to national security are greatest - the risk areas. One example is knowledge that can be used for both civilian and military purposes (dual use).

⁴ Office of Financial Analysis: Technical Assistance and Intangible Technology Transfer Handbook, 2021 - <https://www.financnianalytickyrad.cz/files/prirucka-technicke-pomoci-a-nehmotneho-prenosu-technologie.pdf>



3. The Ministry of Education should request information from all public universities on which Chinese entities they cooperate with and then discuss with Czech universities the existing risks in cooperation with the Working Group, using the “ASPI University Tracker” tool.

“ASPI University Tracker” is a database of Chinese institutions engaged in military or security science and technology research. It was created by the International Cyber Policy Centre of the Australian think tank ASPI (Australian Strategic Planning Institute). It is the most prestigious and detailed database in this field in existence.

With this knowledge, universities will then be able to know in advance the dangers they face when cooperating with specific Chinese universities and will thus be able to avoid the risky ones and not enter into cooperation with them at all.

Link: <https://unitracker.aspi.org.au/>

4. Ensuring sufficient funding for expertise on China from non-Chinese sources

The aim is to reduce the dependence of China studies on decisions and resources from the PRC (visas, funding, teaching staff) and the institutions that train new experts, and to build capacity for independent research on China in the Czech Republic: the need to compensate for the extensive funds of the Czech state for Chinese language studies and specialization in China, to increase resources, for example through TAČR and GAČR or EU funds.

Czech universities should develop and expand Chinese language and cultural studies in cooperation with Taiwanese academic institutions.

One of the possible solutions is the creation of its own research institute on China, which would be public and paid for by the state, as some other countries have set up.

Such national centers for China would be dedicated to spectrum-wide monitoring and study of the PRC, as situational awareness is the first step to countering influence activities.

The centres could be modelled on the Chinese centre recently established in Sweden - Nationellt kunskapscentrum för Kina.

The Swedish model: the Swedish National Chinese Centre

- The Swedish National China Centre conducts policy-related research on China-related topics. The focus is on issues of particular relevance to Swedish interests. The Centre aims to contribute to the long-term improvement of the state of China-related knowledge in Swedish society.
- Similar institutes exist in the Netherlands and India.



- The Dutch model: The **China Knowledge Centre** at the Netherlands Institute of International Relations (Clingendael).
- Clingendael is a think tank established and funded by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The centre has 16 experts whose expertise is consulted by both the state government and regional governments.

5. The need for oversight and control of Chinese student associations to maintain academic freedom on campuses

Chinese students' associations abroad engage in activities worldwide that restrict the free exercise of their members, including academic freedoms and debate in general.

Chinese students abroad organize student associations in each country called CSSA (Chinese Students and Scholars Associations). They are officially non-political, but are demonstrably funded and in key matters directed by the PRC embassies in their countries, used as an instrument by the Chinese government to achieve its own goals on university campuses.

Two main objectives:

- 1) An instrument for protesting against speakers and texts that contradict the official line of the PRC government
 - In many Western countries, these associations, along with Chinese embassies, organize stage opposition to activists who inconvenience the Chinese government, the pressure generated from which is often successful, forcing many universities to cancel scheduled appearances or debates
 - Countless examples - eg: CSSA at Cambridge University closed after it emerged that it had been advised by the Chinese embassy on how to disrupt planned lectures by an exiled Chinese dissident.
- 2) An instrument for self-censorship and reporting "inappropriate" behaviour of other Chinese students
 - Reports other students to embassies (suspicious activities) and monitors for "unpatriotic" speech in class debates, etc., a large number of cases from abroad.
 - The CSSA affiliate at Duke University has been accused of instigating a harassment campaign against a Chinese student who tried to broker reconciliation between the parties to the Free Tibet protest.



The Czech CSSA is one of the smaller and less visible ones, but is nevertheless linked in organisation and personnel with other organisations of the United Front Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (like all CSSAs)⁵.

It is therefore necessary to actively monitor these associations in the Czech Republic to see if they are violating the law and oppressing students as they do in other countries.

At the same time, incidents of direct or indirect harassment, surveillance or threats by the Chinese government at universities should be monitored - reporting annually on the number and nature of these incidents.

6. The Czech state (Mol with MoEYS) should start regular annual training sessions for the leadership of specific departments and faculties of universities in the area of building resilience against influence threats

The training can be based on a similar principle as the existing anti-influence training that the Ministry of the Interior organizes for state administration officials. They draw the attention of the listeners to the basic features of espionage, economic interests of the state or organised crime. They also raise awareness of cyber security.

The same format should be applied to all Czech students and researchers going to countries at risk, so that they leave at least somewhat prepared for the threats they may face during their study stay/internship there. They would be prepared for the situations they may be exposed to during their stay and would be familiar with how to face such situations and how to continue to defend themselves and proceed.

There are many models from abroad, for example from the US and Australia.

7. Every university should have a safety coordinator according to the instructions of the Counter-Influence Manual of the Ministry of Internal Affairs

Each university should create a coordinator for the agenda of protection against foreign influence. He or she should be in charge of the whole process, from ongoing risk assessment to checking compliance with the set measures and training of the persons involved, to archiving all documentation documenting the above steps.

At the same time, it should cooperate with the Ministry of Education in the area of information-sharing and other areas.

Similar measures are recommended by security authorities in the US and the UK, where a number of universities have already adopted them.

5 Jirouš, Filip: The Chinese United Front in the Czech Republic - Methods, goals and organizational structure. <https://dspace.cuni.cz/bitstream/handle/20.500.11956/122925/120371731.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>





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