



ASIA EXPLAINED

TO ANALYZE, TO DEBATE ,TO UNDERSTAND

AE MicroMacro – China

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Poland in Human Rights Council and persecution of Uyghurs in China

What happened? [On 17 October, the UN General Assembly voted to elect Poland to the UN Human Rights Council for the 2020-2022 term.](#) The membership in HRC [is based on equitable geographical distribution,](#) and seats are distributed as follows among regional groups: African States (13) Asia-Pacific States (13), Eastern European States (6), Latin American and Caribbean States (8), Western European and other States (7). New members [will replace 14 countries, which membership in UNHCR expires on December 31, 2019.](#) The group of members elected for years 2020-2022 includes Armenia, Brazil, Germany, Indonesia, Japan, Libya, Marshall Islands, Mauritania, Namibia, Netherlands, Poland, Republic of Korea, Sudan, Venezuela.

Why it matters? HRC produces the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of the human rights records of all UN Member States. HRC can also issue resolutions condemning human rights abuses and calling states for change. On July 9 2019 twenty-two countries at the United Nations' top human rights body [issued a joint statement urging China to end its mass arbitrary detentions and related violations against Muslims](#) in the Xinjiang region. [Approximately one million Uighurs and other Turkic Muslim minorities are reportedly being detained in “re-education” or “de extremification” facilities](#) for minor or seemingly arbitrary infractions without formal charges, due process rights or access to legal representation. They are subjected to abuse and torture, ill-treatment and forced political indoctrination. In response to the letter [China mobilized almost forty like-minded countries including Russia, Myanmar, to sign the letter supporting its actions in Xinjiang.](#) The HRC is one of the forums, where China's atrocities in Xinjiang can be criticized and where China can be officially and publicly called to stop the ethnic cleansing in Xinjiang. However, no resolution against China has been made so far.

Context. The current composition of the HRC packed with authoritarian regimes or countries with poor human rights record strongly undermines the Council's mandate and ability to perform its basic duties. [Citing these reasons US left the HRC last year.](#) Recently Trump administration [imposed sanctions on the Chinese companies](#) and [Chinese officials](#) involved in abuses against Uighurs but the credibility of those steps is disputable due to



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recent US violations of human rights and Trump's support for other authoritarian regimes. US position and current composition of HRC require democratic countries to increase efforts to prevent HRC becoming the tube of oppressive authoritarian regimes.

What can Poland do ?

Poland along with other CEE countries, with exception of Baltics states, have been so far rather silent on the Chinese actions in Xinjiang. While aligning recently its policy with the United States Poland has not condemned China for its ethnic policy in Xinjiang. [In April European Parliament issued a resolution](#) calling China to immediately end the practice of arbitrary detentions, without any charge, trial or conviction for a criminal offense, of members of the Uyghur and Kazakh minority and Tibetans, to close all camps and detention centres and to release the detained persons immediately and unconditionally. Many member states however try to avoid confronting China and keep silence. Poland as a newly elected member should support the voices calling China to end ethnic cleansing, use the HRC forum to criticize Chinese actions and to join the relevant international initiatives. Seeking cooperation with China where it's necessary is encouraged but not at the price of closing eyes on the atrocities. Without the comprehensive and reasonably leveraged pressure exercised by the international community Chinese regime will continue its repressive policy. Recently many democratic countries choose to follow overly simplistic "Realpolitik" or the policy of appeasement towards China. Hopefully, Polish government would not choose this path.