



AE Analysis - China

Łukasz Sarek.

7 December 2020

The CPAFFC as the party-state's guardian of Polish regions' relations with China

For years, the Poland-China Regional Forum has been the largest meeting of representatives from Polish and Chinese regions. It began being held based on agreements concluded as a result of warming relations between China and Poland after President Bronisław Komorowski's visit to China in 2011 and Premier Wen Jiabao's visit to Poland in 2012. [The regional cooperation was included in the agreement in strategic partnership between Poland and China.](#) On the Polish side, the forum was organized by local authorities with support from the central government, which hosts the event. On the Chinese side, the [Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries](#) (CPAFFC, [中国人民对外友好协会](#)) has always been the main event coordinator.

“The CPAFFC is the main ‘people’s diplomacy’ organisation within the CCP foreign-affairs system. It has been used as a tool to advance CCP policy by-passing state channels since its Soviet-modelled origins. Today, it primarily targets foreign subnational governments, political figures and NGOs. Although its official status as a “people’s organisation” (人民团体) might mislead some into an association with civil society groups elsewhere, the CPAFFC is an organ of the party-state, [...] staffed by foreign-affairs cadre and managed (代管) by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. People’s diplomacy (民间外交), as a component of the CCP’s ‘total diplomacy’ (总体外交), is guided by party-state policy. [...] [T]he ‘unofficial diplomacy’ practised by such organs as the CPAFFC is official diplomacy’s ‘assistant’. [...] The association indeed helps promote CCP policy goals, notably Xi’s “Belt and Road” geopolitical initiative¹.

Serving as forum organizer provides the CPAFFC with the opportunity to shape the forum’s agenda, but first and foremost it gives first-hand knowledge about the key figures in the Polish central government, local administration and self-government bodies. It also enables the CPAFFC or other party-state institutions to establish ties with Polish officials. The Chinese organization often serves as a point of first contact for establishing relations with foreign organizations and



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individuals, then profiles them and passes on their contact information to another organization within or associated with the party-state apparatus.

The main organizer of the first forum in 2013 in Gdańsk on the Polish side was the [marshal's office of the Pomeranian Voivodeship](#). It is estimated that around 600 participants, including 130 Chinese delegates, attended the one-day event. [Economy, tourism, education, and culture](#) were the key topics on the forum's agenda. The second forum organized in the following year in Guangzhou was jointly organized by [the CPAFFC, local authorities from Guangdong province and Guangzhou municipality, and the Polish Ministry of Infrastructure and Development](#). It was attended by about 200 participants and [several agreements were signed on the forum's sidelines](#). [The Pomeranian, Silesian, Lesser Poland, and Lower Silesian Voivodeships all sent representatives](#).

The agenda of the first two forums included cooperation areas that could be interesting for the [Polish local authorities](#) and [Polish entrepreneurs](#) and the CPC economic and political agenda was not strongly imprinted in the topics discussed. That changed with the two following events. The third forum, held in Łódź in 2015, was attended by 500-650 people [with 200 delegates from over 20 Chinese provinces](#) including Sichuan, Chongqing, Hebei, and Henan. Grzegorz Schetyna, the Polish minister of foreign affairs, gave the opening speech. [Polish officials attended the forum](#), including Sławomir Żałobka from Ministry of Infrastructure and Development; Olgierd Dziekoński, secretary of state at the Chancellery of the President, Grażyna Henclewska from Ministry of Economy.

The meeting's leitmotif, [highlighted by the CPAFFC was the economic opportunities connected to the BRI initiative](#) one of the CPC's key strategies in foreign policy. Making it the main topic of the forum set it apart from previous meetings, where debates focused on various topics and seemed to correspond the the actual needs of a wider range of Polish regions. This forum was held under the auspices of the [China-CEEC Business Council](#), a body established in December 2014 at the China and Central and Eastern European Countries Economic and Trade Forum in Belgrade. The China Council for the Promotion of International Trade (CCPIT), a party-state affiliate agency engaged in the implementation of China's international economic policy, [was one of the initiators](#).



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The fourth forum was the last to be held thus far. It took place during Xi Jinping's visit to Poland in 2016 and [was organized by the CPAFFC and the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#). One important aspect of this event held in Poland was that for delegations from China it was an opportunity to meet their Polish peers in person and establish or strengthen ties. The regional forum was combined with the International Forum on New Silk Road (Międzynarodowe Forum Nowego Jedwabnego Szlaku). The profile of this combined event was raised by the participation of the highest-ranking Chinese and [Polish officials](#). The CPC general secretary, the Polish president, Andrzej Duda, and the Polish prime minister, Beata Szydło, attended the opening ceremony and gave speeches. However, because the forum was one of many events coinciding with Xi Jinping's visit and its agenda was focused on the BRI and other Chinese policies and the speeches of Chinese official were related to [those policies](#) and [their implementations](#). The regional issues important for Polish actors were again diluted. A fifth forum as planned [to be held in Wuhan in 2017](#). However, as the Polish government began adopting a more cautious approach to cooperating with China, [support for developing cooperation at the regional level faded](#).

Interactions between Polish and Chinese local authorities could be useful for boosting economic and cultural relations. However, Polish organizers and attendees should be fully aware of the status and agenda of the organizations involved on the Chinese side. The Poland-China Regional Forum was useful for the CPAFFC and other party-state organizations, as it allowed them to gain access to Polish local officials, politicians or businessman, as well as, especially during the 3rd and 4th editions, to push for the implementation of CPC policies. Knowledge and understanding of the CPAFFC methods and goals would be helpful for shaping a forum agenda more useful for Poland and limiting the undesirable results of the involvement of party-state organs.

This article is a summarized version of a chapter from a forthcoming report on Chinese influence in Poland on the subnational level produced by the author for Project Sinopsis.

- 1 This paragraph is based on the „Repurposing democracyThe European Parliament China Friendship Cluster” by Jichang Lulu, <https://sinopsis.cz/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/ep.pdf>
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