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CHINA AS A NATIONAL SECURITY THREAT

A comparative study of changing threat perceptions in the Baltic Sea region

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ABSTRACT

As the rise of China is increasingly viewed as a security-related threat, Europe's engagement with China is entering a new phase. This report investigates emerging threat perceptions of China in the Baltic Sea region, focusing specifically on six liberal small states: Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania and Sweden. Conducting a comparative analysis of the past five-year period, the report identifies differences and similarities in emerging threat perceptions and provides an overview of bilateral relations between China and each of the six countries. Specifically, the report examines the securitization of 5G and Huawei and the extraordinary measures adopted by these countries to protect their critical digital infrastructures from any risk of Chinese influence. While the six countries far from constitute a uniform block – as testified, for instance, by Finland and Lithuania's rather different approaches – the report documents how all six countries, notably since 2019, have seen a significant deterioration of their relationship with China as security-related concerns and sensitive political issues have come to dominate the bilateral agenda. Moreover, the report finds that the deterioration of bilateral relationships has primarily been prompted by the dramatic shift in 2018 in the Trump administration's China policy as well as the hardening of the Chinese regime under Xi Jinping, in particular since 2019 as manifested by the systematic violations of liberal human rights in Hong Kong and Xinjiang.

INTRODUCTION

Perceptions of the People's Republic of China (PRC) have recently changed dramatically in many European countries. Five years ago, although Europe and China disagreed on many issues, European leaders were still eagerly pushing for closer ties with Beijing whether by joining Chinese-led multilateral initiatives such as the Asian Infrastructure Development Bank (AIIB), signing memorandums of understanding (MoU) within the framework of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) or cultivating deeper bilateral partnerships with the PRC.[1] Today, however, China is increasingly seen as a security concern – one that takes up an expanding number of paragraphs and pages in official national threat assessment reports. This change of perception comes against the backdrop of a deepening US-China strategic rivalry that has prompted Washington to put pressure on its European allies to distance themselves from Beijing in several security-related domains. [2] Meanwhile, the European Union has attempted to strike its own balance in the rapidly shifting strategic landscape, categorising the PRC as not only an important partner, but also 'a systemic rival' in a much-cited official strategy paper from March 2019.[3] Recently, relations between the two sides have been further strained by conflicting approaches to the Covid-19 pandemic, the introduction of mutual Xinjiang-related sanctions, the freeze of a long-negotiated bilateral investment treaty, the position of Huawei in Europe's 5G infrastructure and several other thorny issues. Both political and security-related concerns have thus crept into Europe's relationship with China, raising fundamental questions about how to engage the country.

This report explores changing European perceptions of China, focusing specifically on the Baltic Sea region to map current development trends. It demonstrates when and how China has come to be seen as a national security threat and how countries in the region have handled this threat in the domain of critical digital infrastructure. Moreover, the report provides an overview of the bilateral relationships between

China and these countries at a time when human rights and other sensitive issues have come to dominate the political agenda. It argues that the re-politicisation of human rights issues at the bilateral level constitutes a distinct disruptive dynamic that, in combination with growing security concerns, has caused relations with Beijing to become highly fractious. Comparing these development trends across the Baltic Sea region enables us to identify important similarities and differences in the overall pattern and to eventually reflect on some of the underlying drivers.

The Baltic Sea region is usually associated with nine coastal states that have shorelines along the Baltic Sea: Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Russia and Sweden. As an outlier in the Baltic Sea region with a special

relationship to the PRC, Russia is left aside in this report, while Germany and Poland are also excluded here because they differ significantly from the other six countries in terms of size and their position in Europe. The remaining six Baltic Sea region countries – Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania and Sweden – will subsequently be referred to collectively as the BS6. As small liberal-democratic EU member states allied or affiliated with the United States, these countries are similar to one another in several important structural respects that are likely to shape their relations to the PRC (see Chapter 1). Furthermore, the BS6 countries appear sensitive to the deepening US-China great power rivalry, in particular the more confrontational China policies pursued by the US since 2018. Indeed, the following chapters will demonstrate how, over the past couple of years, *all* the BS6 countries have seen their relations with Beijing take a downward turn as security-related and sensitive political issues have come to dominate the bilateral agenda.

Even so, the BS6 countries do *not* constitute a uniform block in the way they perceive and approach Beijing. Where Finland, on the one hand, has only cautiously distanced itself from the PRC in some respects, Lithuania, on the other, has recently become one of the most vocal critics of China in Europe, not shying away from challenging Beijing on highly sensitive questions such as Taiwan's political status and the alleged genocide in the Xinjiang province (see Chapter 1). Such differences across the BS6 countries reflect the way structural background conditions are always moderated by each country's particular foreign policy tradition as well as the specific character of its bilateral relationship with Beijing. Quite remarkably, however, even in the case of Denmark, whose `Comprehensive Strategic Partnership´ with China has been a source of pride and a top political priority for many years, perceptions of the PRC have undergone fundamental changes that may ultimately transform China from being a partner to an adversary.[4]

The liberal small states of the Baltic Sea region are particularly useful to examine in the context of Europe's relationship with the PRC for several reasons (apart from their similarities). First, together with the other two Nordic states (Norway and Iceland), the BS6 countries tend to coordinate their policy positions among themselves within the so-called Nordic-Baltic (or NB8) format, including their China policies on sensitive topics.[5] Hence, they offer a specific Nordic-Baltic perspective on the rise of China when EU members discuss and seek coordination on their China policies. Second, the Nordic BS6 countries' relations with the PRC have historically often served as a barometer of wider development trends as when they were among the very first to recognise the PRC back in 1950 or impose sanctions on the Chinese government in 1989.[6] Now, Lithuania may similarly be blazing a trail for its Nordic-Baltic fellows and perhaps Europe more broadly. Third, as fully committed EU

members with strong ties to the US, the BS6 countries seems to constitute a critical case of how the deepening US-China strategic rivalry is likely to affect Europe's relations with the PRC.

ROADMAP AND METHODOLOGY

The report consists of four chapters after this introduction. To set the scene for the comparative analysis, the first one provides an overview of each of the BS6 countries' bilateral relations with China and traces the most important developments over the past five years. The second chapter examines changing threat perceptions of China across the BS6 countries by studying the way China is presented in official government risk and threat assessment reports since 2017. The third chapter examines how each of the BS6 countries has handled the most salient security-related concern about China's growing influence, namely the perceived threat posed by Huawei to the critical digital infrastructure of these countries. The fourth chapter explores the disruptive expansion of security dynamics to other parts of bilateral relations, takes a look at the recent re-politicisation of sensitive human rights issues and finally reflects on the main drivers behind the observed deterioration of bilateral relations. It also identifies some of the main similarities and differences between the specific approaches adopted by the BS6 countries.

The findings of this report are based on various sources. Eleven online semi-structured interviews were conducted anonymously with centrally placed civil servants and experts in the BS6 countries during the period September-October 2021. Each interviewee in advance received a set of similarly framed questions about recent development trends in relations between the specific BS6 country and the PRC to ensure some consistency across the examined case countries. Inputs from the interviewees were primarily used to account for recent developments in the six bilateral relationships (Chapter 1) as well as to guide the discussions and reflections on the main drivers in the last part of the report (Chapter 4). The initial objective was to conduct two interviews for each case country, but it turned out to be impossible to arrange interviews with any officials from the Lithuanian ministries 'as a matter of the institutional policy' because of 'recent dynamics in relations between China and Lithuania', as one Lithuanian official put it.[7] Apart from these interviews, the following four chapters use a wide range of publicly available primary and secondary sources compiled from news media, government sites and academic institutions to support the observations, findings and arguments along the way.

A final note on some of the main limitations: while the report investigates threat perceptions of China and counter measures by the BS6 countries, it does *not* seek to determine whether Huawei really poses a security threat to these countries, whether Huawei is in reality controlled by the Chinese government or whether the BS6 countries' use of extraordinary measures is warranted or, for that matter, effective. Rather, the approach adopted here primarily lies within the mainstream social constructivist tradition of International Relations, and Chapter 3 draws upon the terminology of Securitization theory without being explicitly theoretical.[8]

1 CURRENT BILATERAL RELATIONS

What is the overall state of current bilateral relations between the BS6 countries and the PRC, and what has been the general development trend over the past five years? In order to set the scene for comparative analysis – not only across the BS6 countries, but also within each country over time – this chapter provides an overview of each of the six bilateral relationships and lists a number of factual background data in Table 1.

The BS6 countries are similarly positioned vis-à-vis the PRC in several important ways. Taken together, they constitute a set of underlying structural conditions that shape the countries' relations with Beijing. These structural conditions are derived from their position and status as:

- *Small states* [population size of 10 million or less; GDPs outside world's top-20; limited military power projection capacity]
- *Liberal democracies* [the BS6 are ranked from #2 (Sweden) to #42 (Lithuania) on the 'Democracy Index' [9] compared to the PRC's categorisation as authoritarian, i.e. #151]
- *EU member states* [Denmark since 1973, Finland and Sweden since 1995, and Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania since 2004]
- *US allies and partners* [Denmark, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania as NATO members; Finland and Sweden as partners with close ties to NATO and interoperable military forces[10]]

The BS6 countries can consequently be regarded as a group of like-minded countries that belong to a larger circle of Western countries, and as such, they tend to share American perceptions of the PRC as a repressive authoritarian regime. Until recently, they have been less inclined to regard the PRC as a national security threat. However, with the intensification of the US-China great power rivalry, Washington has applied pressure on the BS6 – both publicly and diplomatically behind the scenes – to align their China policies with those of the US (see Chapter 3). Furthermore, policy coordination on China-related issues has recently increased within the EU[11] and is supported by all of the BS6 countries (according to the interviewees). Hence, it is assumed here that policy convergence or at least coordination is taking place to some extent among the BS6 with respect to their perceptions of and positions towards the PRC over the past few years. To better assess the scope of change as well as similarities and differences, this chapter provides an initial overview of bilateral relations between the BS6 countries and the PRC over the past five years as seen from the perspective of the former.[12]

Table 1. Bilateral relations between the BS6 countries and the PRC

BS6 countries	Denmark	Estonia	Finland	Latvia	Lithuania	Sweden
Start of official bilateral relations with China	1950	1991	1950	1991	1991	1950
Framework for bilateral relationship with China	'Comprehensive Strategic Partnership'	(MoUs & bilateral agreements)	'Future-oriented new type of cooperative partnership'	(MoUs & bilateral agreements)	(MoUs & bilateral agreements)	(MoUs & bilateral agreements)
China's share of total imports & exports in goods (2019 data[128])	7.2% & 5.5%	5.9% & 1.8%	6.4% & 5.7%	3.5% & 1.5%	3.9% & 1.3%	6.1% & 5.2%
Affiliation with Chinese institutions	AIIB (2016)	BRI (2017) 16+1	AIIB (2016)	BRI (2016) 16+1	BRI (2017)	AIIB (2016)
Size of Beijing embassy (excluding local Chinese staff, 2019 data)	35 staff	4-6 staff	23 staff	7-8 staff	N/A	31 staff
Confucius Institutes [current number + previous maximum in parenthesis]	1 (3) Kolding IBA	1 (1) Tallinn University	1 (1) Helsinki University	1 (1) Latvia University	1 (1) Vilnius University	0 (3)

DENMARK AND CHINA[13]

Back in 2016, the preamble to the new joint work program for the 'Comprehensive Strategic Partnership' between Denmark and China stated that 'the bilateral relationship has reached an all-time high'. Indeed, Denmark is the only of the BS6 countries to have established such a formalised and wide-ranging partnership with the PRC, encompassing more than 50 MoUs (in 2016) across a broad range of areas of government-to-government collaboration. Danish governments have conducted eight or nine annual high-level visits to China before 2019, the embassy in Beijing ranks as Denmark's largest diplomatic mission, and two giant pandas finally arrived at Copenhagen Zoo in 2019 after years of preparations. However, bilateral relations have, in the words of one interviewee, 'been severely damaged' over the past few years, starting with growing suspicions about potential Chinese investments in Greenland and culminating recently with a series of confrontations over, among other things, Beijing's crackdown in Hong Kong, its repression of Uighurs in Xinjiang, its sanctions against the Copenhagen-based Alliance of Democracies and its demand for an apology from *Jyllands-Posten* because of a cartoon that replaced the stars in the Chinese flag with coronavirus symbols. Meanwhile, both in 2018 and 2020, the Danish parliament staged marathon 'China debates' during which all political parties voiced their strong concerns about China's current development trajectory. Taken together, bilateral relations are increasingly defined by fundamental differences of political values, and the strategic partnership is currently placed in a state of limbo as the previous work program expired in 2020 without being replaced by a new one.

ESTONIA AND CHINA[14]

Five years ago, Estonian-Chinese relations appeared constructive and characterised by progress in several areas after a frosty period following the then president of Estonia, Toomas Hendrik Ilves' meeting with the Dalai Lama back in 2011. Apart from signing a long-anticipated MoU in 2017 on China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the Estonian government finished negotiations with Beijing on a slew of other joint collaboration projects, including an education partnership program (in May), a set of cultural exchange initiatives (in September) and intensified economic collaboration (in November). In early 2018, the most prominent Chinese investment in Estonia so far – the take-over of the Estonian aviation maintenance company Magnetic MRO by Hangxin Aviation – was authorised by the Estonian authorities, while later that year the then Estonian president, Kersti Kaljulaid, travelled to China to participate in the 'summer Davoz' in Tianjin. Over the past couple of years, however,

bilateral relations have become increasingly strained as the two sides have been embroiled in a series of disputes, often conducted via public channels, over China's human rights violations in Hong Kong and Xinjiang. While this deterioration seems to mirror a broader European politicisation of Chinese human rights issues, a couple of bilateral issues have further raised the level of tensions between Tallinn and Beijing. Most importantly, in October 2019 the Estonian government, by signing a joint declaration with Washington on 5G security, took the lead among the Baltic countries in effectively banning Chinese companies from having any role in Estonia's digital critical infrastructure. Indeed, security concerns play an increasingly significant role in bilateral relations as also witnessed in the two most recent annual reports from the Estonian Intelligence Service (see next chapter).

FINLAND AND CHINA[15]

In early 2017, Chinese President Xi Jinping visited Finland – the second state visit ever from China – to sign a joint declaration on the establishment of a so-called 'future-oriented new type of cooperative partnership'. While carefully worded to distinguish itself from existing more formalised partnership nomenclature and to stress Finland's commitments under the EU framework, the joint declaration aims to strengthen bilateral collaboration across a range of issue areas such as green energy, climate change, urbanisation, tourism, research and education. In 2019, the two countries adopted a joint action plan (2019-23) that outlines a number of specific objectives for intensified bilateral collaboration. The new partnership model reflects the pragmatic and commercially oriented nature of bilateral relations that for many years have helped Finland to become the most China-oriented economy among the Nordic countries (ahead of Denmark). Meanwhile, however, political perceptions of the PRC in Finland have gradually started to change as security-related concerns and human rights issues have come to play a more prominent role. Importantly, this 'incremental shift in perceptions' – as a couple of interviewees refer to it – has not been prompted by any specific incidents or developments in bilateral relations between Finland and China. In July 2021, the Finnish MFA launched a comprehensive (35 pages long) 'China strategy' that echoes the terminology adopted by the EU to describe relations with the PRC as containing elements of both 'cooperation, competition and systemic rivalry'. Although the new China strategy points to fundamental differences of political values in Finland-China relations throughout the strategy, it also clearly states that 'Finland relies on the continuity of bilateral relations and consistent cooperation with China based on Finnish interests, goals and values'.[16]

LATVIA AND CHINA[17]

In 2016, Latvia became the only Baltic country to have hosted a summit between China and the CEE countries (within the 16+1 framework), and the Latvian government also used the occasion to sign a MoU with Beijing on the BRI and strike a deal on the opening of a Chinese cultural centre in Riga (in 2019). Having long viewed China as an economic powerhouse, Riga has sought to use its 'golden visa program' and other instruments to attract Chinese economic investments, while hoping to take advantage of its ports and railway lines to become a critical intersection point in the BRI. During 2018, a positive spirit of collaboration still prevailed in the bilateral relationship with three high-level visits between the two countries and the signing of an agreement on cooperation in the field of science and technology. However, the political atmosphere started to change in 2019 – according to centrally placed interviewees – without being caused by any specific bilateral incidents. As the EU's new China strategy paper in early 2019 significantly redefined the terms of engagement with China, and later that year as the Hong Kong protests and Xinjiang controversy attracted growing international media interest, the Latvian government found itself increasingly locked in political disputes with Beijing over Riga's position in these matters. Although public perceptions of China in the Latvian population have not hardened to the same extent as, for instance, in Sweden, recent developments suggest a further deterioration of bilateral relations, including Riga's decision not to send a high-level representative to the 17+1 meeting in March 2021 in Beijing.

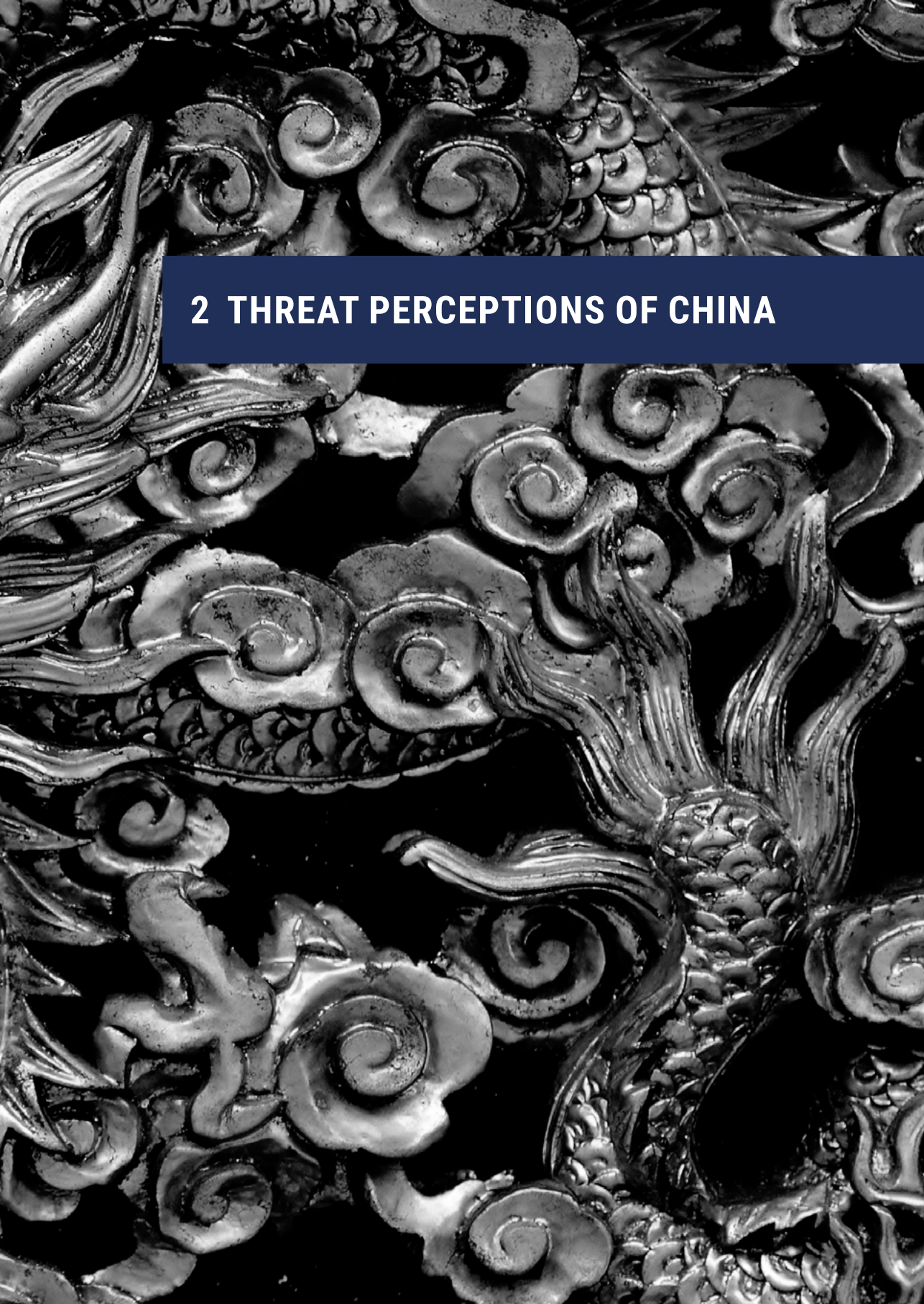
LITHUANIA AND CHINA[18]

Five years ago, the bilateral relationship between Vilnius and Beijing seemed to be back on a constructive track after a two-year freeze in relations triggered by a meeting in 2013 between the then Lithuanian president, Dalia Grybauskaitė, and the Dalai Lama. Hopes for attracting Chinese investments were still high in 2017 as Lithuania (finally) signed on to China's BRI, while Grybauskaitė travelled to Shanghai to open a trade and investment forum. Vilnius also harboured ambitions to become a FinTech gateway for China into Europe, hosting in November 2019 a high-level 17+1 forum to establish 'a network of FinTech coordinators'. However, bilateral relations have taken a dramatic downward turn over the past couple of years, starting with an incident on 23 August 2019 when the Chinese embassy caused a public outcry in Lithuania by orchestrating a counter-demonstration to a 'Baltic Way human chain' in solidarity with the Hong Kong pro-democracy activists. Since then, and especially over the past year, both China and Lithuania have taken several steps

that have seriously derailed bilateral relations, including Beijing's decision to impose sanctions on several Lithuanian diplomats (in retaliation to EU's Xinjiang sanctions) and Vilnius' decision to leave the 17+1 format amid growing frustration with the lack of tangible benefits and its allegedly divisive effects on European unity. Furthermore, crossing several of Beijing's red lines, the Lithuanian parliament in May adopted a non-binding resolution referring to the 'genocide' in Xinjiang, while in August the Lithuanian government announced that it will allow Taipei to open a 'Taiwanese (rather than Taipei) representative office' in Vilnius, an unprecedented diplomatic gesture. In response, China seems to have enacted a new freeze in bilateral relations and has even recalled its ambassador from Vilnius, an instrument not used by Beijing for many years.

SWEDEN AND CHINA[19]

For many years, Swedish and Chinese diplomats were fond of referring to each other as 'good old friends' (*lao pengyou*), paying tribute to the fact that Sweden was the first Western country to establish full diplomatic relations with the PRC. Although never seeking a formalised bilateral relationship like Denmark, Sweden has developed an equally wide-ranging partnership with the PRC, organised around a host of MoUs, frequent high-level visits to China, a sizable embassy in Beijing and a multitude of collaborative projects, including on research and technology where China in 2016 was granted permission to operate a satellite ground station in Kiruna. Moreover, trade relations remain strong, and Sweden has (unlike Denmark) seen significant foreign direct investments from China as demonstrated by Geely's 3.3 billion takeover of AB Volvo in 2018. Over the past five years, however, a series of diplomatic clashes have – as one interviewee puts it – cast long shadows over the bilateral relationship, starting in 2015 with the controversial abduction in Thailand of Swedish citizen Gui Minhai by the Chinese authorities. The intimidating 'wolf warrior' style of diplomacy conducted by China's then ambassador to Sweden, Gui Congyou (2017-2021), has been particularly damaging to the relationship, while a comedy skit on Swedish television in 2018 making fun of Chinese tourists led to Beijing repeatedly calling for an official apology. In the meantime, popular views in Sweden of China have become the most negative among all Europeans, and bilateral relations deteriorated even further in October 2020, when the Swedish authorities issued an outright ban on Huawei's equipment in Sweden's critical digital infrastructure. Even so, the Swedish government has striven to maintain a workable relationship with Beijing by placing bilateral relations within the broader framework of EU-China relations, as envisioned in the government's official 'Approach to matters relating to China' from 2019.[20]



2 THREAT PERCEPTIONS OF CHINA

When NATO published its 'Brussels Summit Communiqué' in June 2021, most observers noted how the PRC – barely mentioned in previous communiqués – was now depicted as a potential security threat to the transatlantic alliance.[21] As four of the BS6 countries, in their capacity as NATO members, have signed on to the consensus-based communiqué, one would expect a similar change of perceptions to have materialised in their national risk and threat assessment reports. This chapter conducts a comparative analysis of changing threat perceptions among the BS6 countries in order to examine: (1) how the PRC has been perceived over time in the annual reports of the national security and intelligence agencies; and (2) the type of perceived threats that the PRC poses to the national security of each of the six countries.

The examination uses two data points during the past five-year period. Given some variation in the frequency of publishing official threat assessments, 2017 was selected as the starting point of the comparative analysis for all six countries, while the most recently available assessment (2020 or 2021) served as the end point. Moreover, the publication of these assessments falls within the purview of different types of national intelligence agencies (defence, police and national security agencies, see Table 2), which to some extent may shape the focus in the reports. However, in each case the selected report is the one that most clearly offers an overall assessment of current threats to national security.[22] It should be noted from the outset that, fully in line with the terminology in the reports, the term 'threats to national security' will be used here in a broad sense (beyond just the traditional military domain) to encompass all those risks and challenges that negatively affect the security or vital interests of the country, including its liberal freedoms. Indeed, the BS6 countries do not view the Chinese military as a direct threat to their national security, notwithstanding occasional joint military exercises with the Russians, including one in the Baltic Sea in 2017.[23]

CHANGING PERCEPTIONS

At first glance, the change in threat perceptions seems quite dramatic (see Table 2). Leaving aside Finland for practical reasons (only one data point), the PRC figures far more prominently in the most recent threat assessment reports than back in 2017. In fact, none of the 2017 reports present China as a *national* security threat, and China is barely mentioned at all except in the Danish and Estonian reports which have an international focus. Today, China has become a major concern in several reports and even a topic in its own right in both the Danish and Estonian reports. In

the latter, the special section on China sets an almost ominous tone in the opening lines: 'Implementing China's foreign policy doctrine, or creating a "community of common destiny", will lead to a silenced world dominated by Beijing'.[24] Likewise, the Lithuanian report depicts China as a country of 'mass surveillance by CCTV cameras and drones' and warns how 'China exploits the pandemic to expand its influence in Lithuania'.[25] Under the headline 'Extensive attacks on democracy', the Swedish report singles out China (along with Russia and Iran) as 'hostile states [that] target everything from our constitutional rights and freedoms to our economic prosperity, political decision-making and territorial sovereignty'.[26]

Even as the PRC has clearly become a major security concern in the BS6 countries, it remains far behind Russia as the principal national security threat in all the reports. Hence, the national defence and security agencies devote most of their attention to Russia as they grapple with how to protect themselves against Russian cyber-attacks, hostile influence operations and, ultimately, the traditional power projection capabilities of the Russian military. Furthermore, despite occasional strong-worded statements, China is *not* evoked as an existential or imminent security threat. Rather, the reports convey a number of security-related concerns about China's growing capacity and willingness to pursue its interests more assertively, and these concerns are exacerbated by the country's deepening authoritarian development trajectory under Xi Jinping. Nevertheless, it is quite remarkable to observe how the PRC has now emerged as a major security concern for the national intelligence services in all the BS6 countries.

TYPES OF THREATS

Some of the BS6 countries have their own specific security concerns about China. For instance, Denmark worries about the expansion of Chinese activities and investments in the Arctic where Greenland seems particularly vulnerable given the miniscule size of its economy and the magnitude of its geostrategic value to the US. Estonia, on the other hand, is particularly concerned about the risk of China and Russia moving 'from coordinated military action […] towards a real alliance in the coming years'.[27] Apart from such specific focus areas, the overall pattern of threat perceptions is quite similar across the six countries.

Table 2. Threat perceptions of China among the BS6 countries

	Denmark	Estonia	Finland	Latvia	Lithuania	Sweden
Publisher of national threat assessment report (publication year)	*Defence Intelligence Service*: 'Intelligence Risk Assessment' (2017/2020)	*Foreign Intelligence Service*: 'International Security and Estonia' (2017/2021)	*Security and Intelligence Service*: 'National Security Overview' (----/2020)[129]	*Latvian State Security Service*: annual report (2017/2020)	*State Security Department*: 'National Security Threat Assessment' (2017/2021)	*Swedish Security Service*: annual report (2017/2020)
Increase in number of references to China/Chinese[130] [number of ref. pr. page]	109 → 289 [1.9 → 3.9]	42 → 164 [0.7 → 2.1]	? → 2 [? → 0.4]	1 → 49 (0.0 → 0.9]	3 → 49 [0.1 → 0.6]	2 → 40 (0.0 → 0.8)
First report that presents China as a national security threat	N/A[131]	2019	2020	2020 (2018)[132]	2019	2019 (2018)[133]
Primary focus of report	International focus	International focus	Domestic focus	Domestic focus	Domestic focus	Domestic focus
Strongest terms used about China threat	'China is adopting increasingly hard-handed and assertive measures to quell criticism'	'an increasingly authoritarian China forces its model of government on other countries'	'The risk to the information infrastructure is particularly high' [from China]	'China's increasing activities in Latvia's information space […] generated risks to the national security of Latvia'	'enable China to advance dependency on its technology […] to undermine critical infrastructure in case of crisis'	'China has both the intent and capability to weaken and limit Sweden's capacity to act'
Three main types of national security threats posed by China	* Opinion control * Chinese activities in the Arctic * Control of critical infrastructure	* Opinion control * China-Russia collaboration * Control of critical infrastructure	* Intelligence activities * Control of critical infrastructure	* Opinion control * Influence activities * Intelligence activities	* Opinion control * Influence activities * Control of critical infrastructure	* Opinion control * Intelligence activities * Control of critical infrastructure

Five of the six countries emphasise how the PRC is increasingly willing to exert what can be referred to as 'opinion control'. This term includes public or covert activities by the Chinese authorities – mostly through the Chinese embassies – that target local actors in an assertive or even aggressive manner in order to quell criticism of the Chinese government.[28] Sweden stands out among the BS6 countries in having been repeatedly exposed to the PRC's opinion control, which has taken the form of 'pressure or threats exerted against Swedish political decision-makers, researchers, public figures and others'.[29] Since 2018, the Chinese embassy has launched a public propaganda and intimidation campaign in Sweden to counter any criticism of the Chinese government,[30] which in addition has taken the unprecedented step in March

2021 to adopt sanctions against a named Swedish researcher and, by extension, apparently also his research institute.[31]

In Denmark, Chinese opinion control has mostly been wielded behind the scenes to target Danish institutions that have hosted, permitted or simply ignored critics of the communist regime such as Falun Gong, pro-Tibet communities, Hong Kong activists or Taiwan supporters,[32] but the Chinese authorities have also gradually stepped up their public criticism. They sanctioned, for example, the Copenhagen-based NGO Alliance of Democracies in March 2021. Addressing the broader pattern of Chinese opinion control, the Danish Defence Intelligence Service (DDIS) observes that 'China is adopting increasingly hard-handed and assertive measures to quell criticism of the Chinese Communist Party's policies and China's political system'.[33]

The state security services of the Baltic states also direct attention to various types and manifestations of Chinese opinion control. The Lithuanian report observes how 'China's authorities attempt to expand their influence in Lithuania through the Chinese Embassy'[34] following the highly controversial incident in 2019 when embassy staff were involved in a counter-demonstration against Hong Kong pro-democracy activists.[35] In the borderland between opinion control and influence activities, the Lithuanian report also puts the spotlight on Chinese propaganda during the pandemic 'to counter international criticism about China's initial poor handling of the coronavirus outbreak'.[36] Its Latvian counterpart points to several recent examples of 'aggressive influence activities' by the Chinese, including 'efforts to forbid publications which criticise China's political course and the efforts to achieve the removal from media content of materials which are unflattering to China's political course'. […] In light of this development, the Latvian State Security Service warns that 'China's increasing activities in Latvia's information space must be evaluated together with their generated risks to the national security of Latvia'.[37] The strongest words used about Chinese opinion control come from the Estonian Foreign Intelligence Service, which claims that China 'wants to use its size and influence to muffle any critical voices from Europe' adding that 'an increasingly authoritarian China forces its model of government on other countries'.[38] Such harsh measures of Chinese opinion control have not, however, been observed in Estonia, which has so far mostly had to deal with different types of Chinese influence activities.[39]

Another shared threat perception among the BS6 countries concerns the risk of China gaining control over parts of their critical infrastructure. This control of critical infrastructure could take various forms, including through the acquisition of key infrastructural hubs such as ports and airports or the provision of Chinese equipment

or services for vital communications networks such as 5G digital infrastructure (see next chapter). Most of the threat assessment reports are particularly concerned with this challenge, including the Finnish Security and Intelligence Service (SUPO) which states that 'The risk [from China] to the information infrastructure is particularly high, as this can give authoritarian administrations access not only to the infrastructure itself, but also to Finnish information'.[40] The State Security Department of Lithuania paints a gloomy picture of the potential risks by arguing that 'Chinese attempts to gain access to critical infrastructure reflect China's overall objective to extend a long-term worldwide influence over strategic sectors. This would further enable China to advance dependency on its technology, to carry out intrusive cyber operations […] and would build its potential to undermine critical infrastructure in case of crisis'.[41] Equally stark words are found in the Estonian report: 'China's ambition to become the world leader in technology poses major security threats. […] Integrating Estonia into China's autonomous technology ecosystem makes Estonia vulnerable and dependent on China'.[42] Focusing specifically on the digital infrastructure, the Swedish Security Service observes along similar lines that 'we need to ensure that hostile states [i.e. China, specified elsewhere] cannot use the 5G network to gather sensitive information or for influencing, control or sabotage purposes'.[43] The Danish report also discusses the risks to the critical digital infrastructure at some length, yet without referring directly to China or Huawei: 'Some suppliers of digital products may pose a threat to Denmark's strategic interests'.[44]

In addition to the widely shared perception of the growing risks of Chinese opinion and infrastructural control, some of the BS6 countries also harbour other types of concerns about China's growing influence in their threat assessment. For example, several reports point to an increase in Chinese intelligence and influence activities, as manifested in particular during the pandemic where the Chinese government has stepped up its efforts to shape the framing of and narrative about the Covid-19 crisis. Yet, these kind of activities are not presented as major risks or threats to the BS6 countries. Some reports also discuss Chinese cyber espionage activities targeting, among others, local companies.

THE OVERALL DEVELOPMENT TREND

As perceptions of China among the BS6 countries are undergoing a fundamental shift, official risk and threat assessment reports provide a useful lens through which to gauge the development. This chapter has demonstrated that the PRC is now perceived as a national security threat to the BS6 countries. While not articulated as an acute or existential threat, China is nevertheless increasingly seen as an adversary with hostile intentions, thereby instilling a new sense of cautiousness and distrust into bilateral relationships with Beijing. The second finding is that the BS6 countries share a perception of China as a threat, direct or indirect, to their liberal freedoms as Beijing seeks to exert opinion control in various ways. Although China's opinion control mostly pertains to matters deemed politically sensitive by Beijing – e.g., its repressive policies in Xinjiang, Hongkong or Tibet – it seems to provoke a backlash and even pushback from the BS6 countries (see Chapter 4). Third, the PRC is also now viewed as a security-related threat to the critical infrastructures of the BS6 countries. And since important security interests are at stake, these six countries have already resorted to various types of extraordinary measures to counter this threat, as the next chapter will show.


太升提督手机购物节
手机0元带回家
vivo
新年享新机
HUAWEI

3 THE SECURITIZATION OF 5G AND HUAWEI

Five years ago, the first signs started to appear that the BS6 countries were not only increasingly concerned about the security implications of Chinese investments, but were also willing to block potential Chinese investments over such security concerns.[45] An early example was the attempt in 2016 by a Chinese investor, General Nice Group, to buy an abandoned marine station in Grønnedal, Greenland, prompting the Danish government to suddenly announce new plans for the marine station amid widespread speculation that the US would not accept a Chinese take-over.[46] The following year, a proposal by a Chinese consortium to build what would allegedly be Scandinavia's largest deep-water port in Lysekil, Sweden, was abandoned after heated debate about the security risks entailed by leaving potentially critical infrastructure to be run by Chinese companies with ties to the Chinese military.[47] In 2019, another deep-water port project in Klaipeda, Lithuania, which had long been promoted by Chinese investors headed by China Merchant Group, sparked widespread security concerns about the risks involved in giving the Chinese access to a port of strategic importance to NATO contingency plans in the Baltic countries.[48] However, it was not until the question of 5G security and Huawei's role as a provider of 5G technology was placed on the political agenda that the PRC became widely regarded as a security threat to the critical infrastructures of the BS6 countries.

This chapter provides a comparative overview of how the BS6 countries have handled the threat posed by China, and more specifically Huawei, to their critical digital infrastructures. Critical infrastructure is understood here as those systems and assets, physical or virtual, being so essential to society that their disruption could have a debilitating effect in terms of national security, order and governance, public health and safety, economic viability etc. There is widespread consensus that the 5G mobile digital network, once it is fully installed and operational, will constitute a central component of any modern society's critical infrastructure. Whether China would actually be able to use Huawei's equipment to not just conduct cyberespionage, but also ultimately disrupt the digital infrastructure of other countries – as the US government has claimed (see below) – remains an open question which is not pursued any further here. The chapter accounts for similarities and differences in how the BS6 countries have dealt with 5G security and the Huawei issue. To begin with, the basic securitization terminology is briefly introduced in order to demonstrate how Huawei came to be seen as a security threat to the BS6 countries.

According to securitization scholars investigating the social construction of security, successful securitization requires the invocation of an existential threat to a referent object that, if accepted by the relevant audience, will pave the way for the adoption of exceptional measures to handle that threat.[49] As none of the governments of the BS6 countries have publicly presented the PRC as an acute or existential threat to

their national security (see previous chapter), it will instead be argued here that Huawei, and in effect China, have been successfully securitized by the BS6 countries in what can be referred to as a *securitization process by proxy*. This means, on the one hand, that the US has served the (proxy) role as the securitizing actor, publicly depicting China and Huawei as a critical security threat in a speech act that has been accepted by the BS6 countries (the relevant audience); and on the other, that the BS6 countries (as proxies) have bought into the securitization logic by resorting to different types of extraordinary counter measures to prevent Huawei and China from having any stake in their critical digital infrastructure.

US SECURITIZATION OF HUAWEI AND CHINA

The role of the US as a securitizing actor has had a huge influence on the BS6 countries.[50] Over the course of a ten-month period during 2018-19, the Trump administration carried out a comprehensive and systematic securitizing move to present Chinese telecom giant Huawei as a national security threat. Starting in August 2018 when the president signed a 'National Defense Authorization Act' [51] that banned Huawei (and ZTE) from being used by the US government and its contractors, the Trump administration gradually stepped up the pressure on Huawei. This culminated in May 2019 with an executive order that effectively decoupled the Chinese company from US technology and the US market on national security grounds.[52] The executive order from the president stated that:

> "[…] foreign adversaries are increasingly creating and exploiting vulnerabilities in information and communications technology [which] constitutes an unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security […] of the United States. In light of these findings, I hereby declare a national emergency with respect to this threat.[53]"

While the executive order itself did not single out China or Huawei, US government agencies have subsequently specifically designated Huawei as a national security threat when implementing the executive order.[54] Moreover, in the months leading up to the executive order different branches of the US government had repeatedly and directly targeted Huawei in the media citing security concerns.[55] The campaign against Huawei then came against the backdrop of a wider securitization discourse directed at the PRC, the key components of which were first introduced on 4 October 2018 by Vice President Mike Pence in a seminal speech on US China policy delivered at the Hudson Institute.[56]

Midway into 2019, the US government had successfully managed to securitize Huawei (and China). With Secretary of State Mike Pompeo in a leading role, the Trump administration had also engaged an 'external audience' of allies and partners in order to convince them about the security threat posed by Huawei. In late 2018, the Trump administration launched a diplomatic offensive[57] followed in early 2019 by a high-level public pressure campaign[58] to directly warn US allies and partners against using Huawei's equipment. In April 2019, the Trump administration had presented its 'Clean Path' initiative to safeguard digital assets 'from aggressive intrusions by malign actors, such as the Chinese Communist Party'.[59] By August, the initiative expanded into a comprehensive decoupling programme to ensure 'clean' carriers, storage, apps, cloud, cables and paths, and Pompeo called 'on all freedom-loving nations and companies to join the Clean Network'.[60] As such, the Trump administration had drawn up a masterplan for widening the initial securitization of Huawei.

SECURITIZATION OF 5G AND HUAWEI BY THE BS6 COUNTRIES

It is quite remarkable how perceptions of Huawei have changed in the BS6 countries. At the beginning of 2019, Huawei was still deeply involved in developing and testing 5G mobile networks in partnership with the major local telecommunication companies in all the six countries (see below), and Huawei had also initiated collaborative projects with local universities in Denmark (Aalborg University), Estonia (Tallinn University of Technology) and Finland (Aalto University). It therefore testifies to the effectiveness of the US's securitization move that, with the exception of Finland, the BS6 countries have introduced extraordinary, disruptive measures of regulation that were clearly directed at Huawei even if WTO rules against non-discriminatory practices precludes an outright ban of the Chinese company. The following four sections examines how the BS6 countries have approached the question of 5G security and specifies the extent to which they have accepted the securitization of Huawei. The fourth section lumps together the Baltic countries as they have generally followed a similar path.

It should be noted from the outset that the European Commission, in late March 2019, proposed a set of recommendations on the security of 5G networks that by January 2020 were accompanied by the so-called EU 'toolbox' of risk mitigating measures.[61] However, as the question of 5G security remains a prerogative of the member states, the EU toolbox merely suggests a set of generic guidelines that can facilitate some level of policy coordination, while acknowledging that the national measures 'will not likely require legislative support' from the EU.[62] Another set of

guidelines emerged in May 2019 at a conference in Prague where the United States together with the Europeans and other Western countries agreed on a list of 20 principles to which all countries should adhere in order to properly secure their coming 5G networks. Although 'The Prague Proposals' – like the EU toolbox – do not specifically mention Huawei or China, they do emphasise the 'risk of influence on suppliers from a third country […] notably in relation to its model of governance'.[63]

DENMARK: VIGILANT AND RESPONSIVE

Denmark was the first of the BS6 countries to act on Washington's securitization of Huawei and even among the first to do so in Europe. Already in December 2018, the head of the DDIS, in a rare public statement, conveyed the message that Huawei was 'on the radar of the Danish security authorities'.[64] Around the same time, the Danish defence minister, Claus Hjort Frederiksen, for the first time publicly acknowledged the security-related challenges posed by Huawei.[65] Shortly after in January 2019 – during a public consultation of the defence committee of the Danish parliament on 'Huawei and Danish security policy' – he confirmed that the issue was a 'matter of national security' which is 'taken very seriously' by the Danish authorities.[66] Frederiksen also noted that 'companies like Huawei have close ties to the political system […] and are obliged to assist the Chinese security service'. However, since the authorities had no legal instruments to intervene directly in the market and prevent Danish network operators from using Huawei's 5G equipment, the government used another 'disruption method' apart from the public messaging. With the establishment in 2014 of the Centre for Cyber Security (CFCS), which operates within the DDIS, the Danish authorities had created several lines of direct security-related communication with the telecom sector and could exert pressure through these channels as well.[67] The first result of this combined public and non-public pressure soon emerged.[68]

On 18 March 2019, the leading Danish operator of the existing 4G network, TDC, announced that it had decided to terminate its year-long cooperation with Huawei in favour of Ericsson. While the CEO of TDC, Allison Kirkby, motivated the company's decision on commercial grounds, she also acknowledged that 'We're always in a continuous dialogue with the security services because we are running critical infrastructure'.[69] In November 2020, the other major Danish telecom company with strong ties to Huawei, 3, stated that it would also team up with Ericsson to build its 5G network. The decision followed a protracted negotiation and assessment process during which the Danish prime minister had plainly increased the political pressure on 3 by giving an interview in which she observed that: 'We can't view 5G network providers as merely telecommunication vendors. We have to regard it as security

policy. […] You have to be part of a security community to provide critical Danish infrastructure'.[70] In the meantime, the Danish government prepared a new law (L190) on 'the security of providers of critical infrastructure networks', which in May 2021 was passed by the Danish parliament. The law authorises Centre for Cybersecurity to ban specific vendors 'if the arrangement is deemed to constitute a threat to national security'.[71]

The Danish approach offers some interesting insights. First, given the US's indispensable role as a security provider for Denmark, the Danish government seems to have exercised due diligence as it already in late 2018 started to buy into the emerging American securitization discourse on Huawei. Moreover, especially in the initial phase, Danish government officials openly referred to Huawei as a potential security threat when questions of 5G security were on the public agenda, thereby echoing US rhetoric despite the risk of provoking a backlash from Beijing. Later, however, the Danish government largely avoided naming Huawei directly, and the newly introduced L190 law was kept in neutral, non-discriminatory terms (in line with WTO rules on non-discriminatory regulatory practices). Finally, by mobilising the DDIS/CFCS, which operate outside the public domain and democratic oversight, the Danish government has clearly adopted extraordinary measures to counter the potential security threat to the critical digital infrastructure: first to apply pressure on the main mobile network operators and later to formalise the discretionary (risk and threat assessment-based) monitoring and veto powers of DDIS/CFCS over the local telecom companies.

FINLAND: LITTLE ADO ABOUT HUAWEI

At the same time as the debate about Huawei and 5G security raged across Europe, the topic was conspicuous by its virtual absence from the public debate in Finland.[72] Back in February 2019, Finland's largest newspaper reported that SUPO had issued a warning to Finnish companies about the risks entailed by collaboration with Chinese companies because of 'their strong ties to the Chinese government'.[73] Yet, the revelation did not spark much public debate or political intervention. Instead, the Finnish government has relied on the existing legal framework for regulating the telecom industry, including the issue of 5G security, with the Finnish Transport and Communications Agency (Traficom) assuming the specific regulatory responsibility from 2019. Under the Act on Electronic Communications Services (AECS) from 2014, Traficom's predecessor already had the authority to deny granting a license to a mobile network operator if the authorities had 'weighty reasons to suspect that granting a license to the applicant would apparently risk national security'.[74] In

response to the EU's new 5G toolbox of risk mitigating measures, the AECS law was updated in December 2020 to introduce more regulatory instruments, now enabling Traficom to ban a specific *device* in 'critical parts of a public communications network if there are weighty grounds to suspect that the use of such a device endangers national security or defense'.[75] The updated law also sets up a new advisory board with representatives from both the authorities and the telecom industry to jointly monitor the security of the communication networks.

A few months earlier, the minister of transport and communication, Timo Harakka, gave an interview in which he stressed that the revised law will 'certainly [be] one of the strictest in the world without any names being mentioned', thereby alluding to the Swedish ban on Huawei (see below).[76] A similar message – 'we aren't pointing fingers at any one party' – was conveyed by parliamentarians when the law was passed.[77] In early 2021, however, cracks suddenly appeared in the façade when the head of SUPO, Antti Pelttari, felt compelled to sound the alarm in a much more explicit way:

> There is a danger that an authoritarian state, such as Russia or China, would be able to cripple transport, telecommunications networks, electricity distribution, payment systems and so on in Finland […] I think it must be taken into account when making important decisions about, for example, 5G network suppliers.[78]

Pelttari's statements seem to have been directed at the Finnish mobile network operators, the largest of which, Elisa, shortly after announced that it would join forces with Nokia to develop its 5G network infrastructure.[79] The two other large telecom operators who have been granted 5G licenses in Finland, Telia[80] and Telenor (DNA),[81] will also team up with Nokia, but both Elisa and Telenor use Huawei equipment in parts of their 5G network, which remains a source of concern despite the updated legal framework.

The Finnish approach to 5G security stands out in several ways. First and foremost, 5G has largely been treated as a technical issue that should not be politicised, let alone securitised, despite the public pressure campaign by the US government. Unlike in Denmark, even the question of 5G security remains fully under civilian control, and the National Cyber Security Centre is directly placed under the authority of Traficom. The distinction made in the legal regulatory framework between critical core and more peripheral components of the digital network infrastructure (cf. the EU Toolbox guidelines) also testifies to this more technical approach to 5G security. Indeed, according to Harakka, Finland has 'systematically attended to the security of

the national communications infrastructure since the 1990s. Thus, for Finland the new legislation is simply a further incremental step on a path traced decades ago'.[82]

SWEDEN: TO NAME OR NOT TO NAME HUAWEI

In Sweden, the question of 5G security came to the fore in early 2019. While the main opposition party in Sweden warned about the threat posed by China and Huawei,[83] the Swedish government itself deliberately avoided any finger-pointing, but acknowledged the need for a revision of the existing legal framework, notably to address security concerns about the supplier side of the digital infrastructure.[84] Head of the Swedish Security Service, Klas Friberg, was more outspoken when in May 2019 he cautioned about granting Huawei any role in Sweden's 5G network, pointing to China's 'hostile intentions towards Sweden'.[85] In September 2019, the Swedish government proposed a number of amendments to the Electronic Communications Act from 2003, which were passed by the Swedish parliament in late November.[86] Most importantly, rather than leaving the responsibility over the security of the network equipment to the operators, the amendments authorises the State Security Service (SÄPO) and the armed forces to be involved in the vetting process of granting licenses to network operators to ensure that national security risks are taken into account. Specifically, the Post and Telecom Authority (PTS) must consult SÄPO and the armed forces ahead of granting network licenses, and the latter can appeal any decisions made by PTS in this regard.[87] In reality, the Swedish security community had been given veto power over the decision-making process.

For years, all three of the main mobile network operators in Sweden – Telia, Tele2/Telenor and Tre (3) – collaborated closely with Huawei, whose equipment they had heavily relied on to build their 3G/4G networks.[88] As PTS was preparing to auction 5G network licenses in the fall of 2020, Tele2 and Tre still planned to use Huawei's equipment, whereas Telia had signed a contract with Ericsson. Given this, it was perhaps not entirely surprising when in May 2020, the Swedish minister for energy and digital development, Anders Ygeman, drew headlines by downplaying the risk of using Huawei's equipment and repeating that Swedish legislation is not targeting any specific country or company.[89] However, a few months later on 20 October, PTS shocked the international media by announcing a ban on the use of Huawei's (and ZTE's) equipment as a precondition for granting 5G licenses to Sweden's three largest mobile network operators. The ban even targeted existing Huawei equipment that would have to be removed before 2025.[90] The decision by PTS refers specifically to SÄPO's assessment that 'the Chinese government can exert pressure on Huawei' and that the use of Huawei's equipment 'can be harmful to Sweden's security'. The

ban on Huawei prompted strong reactions from Beijing and the Chinese embassy in Sweden, including a threat of retaliations against Ericsson's activities in China.[91] Huawei itself has appealed PTS's decision to the Swedish courts system, which has so far upheld the ban.[92]

Sweden's approach to 5G security has differed from Denmark and Finland's in important respects. While the Swedish government in early 2019 publicly acknowledged the potential security risks and the need for legal amendments, it was careful not to target Huawei and China directly in its official statements through October 2020. Meanwhile, by granting SÄPO veto power over the question of 5G security and instructing PTS to rely on its assessments, the way was paved not only for introducing extraordinary measures into the technical and administrative decision-making processes of PTS, but also for publicly designating Huawei a security threat. As such, Sweden ultimately went further down the path of securitization than Denmark even if the Swedish government itself attempted to distance itself from the outcome.

THE BALTIC COUNTRIES: TALLINN AS TRAILBLAZER

As the Trump administration started securitizing China and Huawei, there were few initial signs that the Baltic states would jump on the bandwagon. Baltic high-level officials were not publicly depicting Huawei as a security threat, nor did they take the opportunity to raise any public awareness of the 5G security issue. Edgars Rinkēvičs, veteran Latvian foreign minister, seemed to express a shared Baltic wait-and-see attitude to the issue when, in June 2019, he observed that 'there is a question of competition and security. The right balance is still being sought. […] A common European Union policy on 5G and information technology would be needed'.[93] Around the same time, the Lithuanian government adopted a similar position, suggesting that Brussels 'compile a blacklist of tech companies',[94] and that decisions should be made at the level of EU or NATO.[95] Meanwhile, in its 2019 report the Estonian state security services had for the first time addressed the issue of Huawei and 5G security in its annual threat assessment report, noting that 'the risks have to be carefully analysed in order to avoid dependency that could potentially be a security threat to both the public and private sector'.[96] As it turned out, the Estonian government would soon be reaching a conclusion about how to deal effectively with the Huawei issue.

On the last day in October 2019, the Estonian government signed a joint declaration with the United States on 5G security.[97] Endorsing the 'Prague Proposals' as a useful

first step, the declaration went further by listing a set of criteria for evaluating the security risks of network providers and supply chains, including the principle that 'suppliers should not be subject to control by a foreign government without independent judicial review'. Moreover, rather than targeting Huawei directly, it stressed the need to 'transition away from untrusted information and communications technology providers and supply chains to trusted ones [to] improve our national security'. By aligning itself closely with the Trump administration's Clean Network Initiative, Tallinn had in practice banished the Chinese tech giant from Estonia's 5G network. A few months later, on 19 February 2020, Riga followed in Tallinn's footsteps by announcing an almost identical joint declaration with Washington on 5G security, which similarly stresses the importance of 'trustworthy network hardware' and the risks of 'control by a foreign government'.[98] Finally, seven months later on 17 September 2020, the Lithuanian government joined its Baltic neighbours as it adopted a memorandum of understanding with the US government, conveying the same message of collaboration with Washington on the question of 5G security.[99] Without referring explicitly to China or Huawei, all three Baltic countries had now openly sided with the US, placed emphasis on the trust issue as a key criteria for collaboration on critical digital infrastructure and thus in reality endorsed the Trump administration's Clean Network Initiative.

In 2020, several of the leading mobile network operators in the Baltic countries still had strong ties to Huawei and were preparing to roll out their 5G network with Huawei's equipment, notably Elisa in Estonia, Bite in Latvia and Telia as well as Telecentras in Lithuania. Since the joint declarations did *not* imply any formal, let alone legal, ban on Huawei, the Baltic governments embarked on additional law-tightening measures at the national level to effectively bar Huawei from being involved in their critical digital infrastructure. Again, the Estonian government moved first to introduce a bill of amendments to the Electronic Communications Act in March 2020 that were passed almost unanimously two months later by the parliament; lawmakers dubbed the bill the 'Huawei law' even though it does not refer to Huawei.[100] In order 'to ensure national security', the amendments authorises the government to screen – and to require permission for – the hardware and software used in the communications network by the local operators of the network. Additional amendments were submitted in March 2021 by the Estonian government to further specify how network operators 'need to take national security into account' in the future, but the bill has yet to be approved by the parliament.[101] Similar amendments to the existing legal framework have been adopted in Latvia, introducing new measures that will enable the authorities to block Huawei on security-related grounds.[102] Having long relied on its existing quite comprehensive national investment screening laws, the Lithuanian government has also recently tightened

its legal framework to ensure that 5G equipment 'be checked for compliance with national security interests' and to prohibit that 'unreliable manufacturers and suppliers' can take any part in its critical digital infrastructure.[103]

The Baltic states have adopted their own approach to the question of 5G security. At the height of the US securitization campaign in the first half of 2019, there was hardly any political debate about Huawei, and several local mobile network operators moved ahead with Huawei as their main supplier of equipment for planned roll-out of 5G networks. However, with Estonia leading the way, all three Baltic states have subsequently made strategic commitments to develop their 5G networks in collaboration with the US, emphasising political trust as a key criteria for selecting hardware and software suppliers – fully in line with the Clean Network Initiative. Moreover, without pointing the finger directly at Huawei or China, they have introduced new security-related screening measures to their national legal frameworks to effectively ban Chinese suppliers from their networks. The Baltic states have thus accepted the US securitization of 5G and Huawei.

4 SECURITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS CONCERNS: THE TWIN DISRUPTERS

It is significant that the BS6 countries now perceive the PRC as a national security threat. Not so much because of the alleged threat from Huawei, which they have already addressed through the adoption of various types of 'extraordinary measures' to secure their critical digital infrastructures. Rather, even if the BS6 countries have not themselves assumed the role of 'securitizing actors', they have accepted Washington's 'securitization move' and thereby introduced a highly disruptive dynamic into their bilateral relationships with China. Once China is viewed as a security threat, other areas of collaboration may be vulnerable and subjected to similar security-related exemptions. At the same time, another disruptive dynamic has reappeared as the BS6 countries increasingly address Chinese human rights violations and other issues that are deemed highly sensitive by Beijing. Taken together, these two disruptive dynamics threaten to fundamentally damage bilateral relations (cf. Chapter 2), ultimately eliminating any remaining political trust between the two sides and paving the way for a broader decoupling agenda. This chapter starts by exploring how the securitization logic, initially directed at 5G and Huawei, is expanding into new domains of bilateral relations between the BS6 countries and the PRC. It then turns to the other main disruptive dynamic, the political contestation of human rights and other sensitive issues, in order to reflect on its distinctness, importance and relation to the securitization dynamic. Finally, the chapter discusses the main similarities and differences in the current bilateral relationships between the BS6 countries and the PRC.

EXPANDING SECURITIZATION DYNAMICS

Security-related concerns about China's growing influence in the BS6 countries preceded the question of 5G security as witnessed when potential Chinese infrastructural investments in Greenland, Lysekil, Klaipeda and elsewhere sparked fierce debate in some of the countries (see footnotes 52-54). Such concerns also prompted governments to prepare new, or revise existing, investment screening mechanisms at the national level (as well as at the EU level) to handle the new risks. However, the debate about Huawei and 5G security proved to be a defining moment for the BS6 countries. Not only because 5G eventually became a shared security concern across all the countries, but also because of the scale and intensity of the US securitization campaign. Now that Huawei has been successfully securitized as a threat to 5G networks, China-related security concerns seem to be spreading into new areas.

Since late 2020, when the openly China-sceptical conservative government under Ingrida Simonyte took office,[104] Lithuania has taken a highly proactive stance on

other security-related issues that involve the PRC. Already in January 2021, Vilnius announced that it would block an agreement with Chinese state-owned company Nuctech to provide airport security scanning equipment to three Lithuanian airports. When justifying the intervention, Laurynas Kasciunas – the new chair of the Committee on National Security and Defence which had cancelled the agreement over security concerns – bluntly stated that it 'shows that Lithuania has decided not to be part of the techno-sphere being created and controlled by China'.[105] Lithuania's deputy defence minister added that 'The decision to ban Nuctech is a step towards our strategic goal - freedom from unreliable technology suppliers'.[106] Importantly, the US government had already targeted Nuctech, placed the company on its so-called 'entity list' (restricting access to US technology) and embarked on a new securitizing campaign to warn other Western countries about using Nuctech's equipment.[107]

In September 2021, the Lithuanian government once again made headlines by urging its citizens 'not to buy new Chinese phones, and to get rid of those already purchased as fast as reasonably possible'. According to the Lithuanian Ministry of National Defence, a report from its National Cyber Security Centre had found several security flaws in Chinese phones, including an in-built censorship tool in Xiaomi phones that could be activated remotely to detect sensitive terms such as 'Free Tibet' or 'Long live democratic Taiwan'.[108] This time, Vilnius went even further than Washington, as the US government, four months earlier, was forced to remove Xiaomi from one of its blacklists following a lawsuit filed by the Chinese company.[109] What made the move by the Lithuanian government particularly interesting was that it was directed at the other major source of security concerns among the BS6 countries, that is, 'opinion control' rather than 'control of infrastructure' (cf. Chapter 2). Instructing Lithuanians to throw away their Chinese-made phones was by all measures an extraordinary step suggesting that Vilnius is widening the security agenda to focus more on the way the PRC is exerting opinion control beyond its own borders. As the BS6 countries, with the exception of Finland, regard China's growing opinion control as a national security threat, we are likely to see additional measures aimed at countering Beijing's ability to extend its censorship of sensitive topics.

Much of the negative press coverage of the Confucius Institutes (CIs) in the BS6 countries has similarly been centred on the risk of opinion control exercised by these partly Chinese financed and controlled institutions that promote Chinese culture and language.[110] Although there have so far been few, if any, clear examples of such 'opinion control' by the CIs in the BS6 countries, mounting unease and suspicion have already led local university partners in Denmark and Sweden to terminate their partnerships with most of the CIs (see Table 1). It is worth noting that the US

government already in early 2019 stepped up pressure to close US-based CIs and, in August 2020, designated them as 'a foreign mission […] advancing Beijing's global propaganda and malign influence campaign on US campuses'.[111] As the current security climate hardens, remaining CIs in Finland and the Baltic states could find it increasingly difficult to operate and maintain their current hosting arrangements with local partners.

Yet another area of bilateral relations that has recently been affected by expanding securitization dynamics is research collaboration. Only a few years ago, governments, universities and individual researchers in the BS6 countries were still eager to deepen their collaboration with Chinese partners at various levels.[112] Recently, however, calls for tighter regulation have proliferated following media reports, notably in Denmark and Sweden, about Chinese collaboration partners' undisclosed ties to the PLA, the potential misuse of joint research projects to strengthen the Chinese regime's surveillance or repression methods, 'shady methods' for recruiting researchers in the BS6 countries, etc.[113] As a result, the Danish government has announced that it will investigate the risks of conducting research collaboration with 'not like-minded countries' and subsequently introduce new guidelines for researchers.[114] The Swedish government has emphasised 'the risks from a national security and defense perspective that this collaboration [between Swedish and Chinese actors] may entail', while urging the universities to assume the responsibility for assessing the potential risks (in line with the new Security Protection Act).[115] Once again, it should be noted how the US government has already taken several steps to counter security-related risks arising from collaboration with Chinese researchers.[116]

THE RESURGENCE OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND OTHER SENSITIVE ISSUES

The current deterioration of bilateral relations is not only driven by security-related concerns about the rise of China among the BS6 countries. Human rights and other sensitive political issues have once again come to the fore in all six bilateral relationships, thereby adding another highly disruptive dynamic as shown in Chapter 1. Such issues include the Chinese government's systematic violations of liberal human rights in Hong Kong, Tibet and Xinjiang as well as its assertive behaviour in territorial disputes in the South China Sea and towards Taiwan. As these issues pertain to the sovereignty of the PRC and the power monopoly of the CPC (i.e. Chinese core interests), they are deemed highly sensitive (i.e. security-related) by the Chinese government which therefore tolerates no outside interference. This section argues why the recently observed re-emergence of human rights and other sensitive

issues at the top of the bilateral agenda is an important parallel development trend for several reasons.

First, the resurgence of these issues is essentially a *distinct development* that has a disruptive dynamic of its own. Indeed, clashes with Beijing over sensitive issues have been a recurrent spoiler of bilateral relations, periodically even causing a meltdown of political relations. For instance, having received the Dalai Lama respectively in 2009, 2011 and 2013, the Danish, Estonian and Lithuanian governments were all subsequently subjected to a political boycott by Beijing, lasting for two years in the case of both Estonia and Lithuania. In the aftermath of these 'Dalai Lama incidents', sensitive political issues generally receded into the background of relations between the BS6 and the PRC, being addressed discreetly at bilateral meetings or often relegated to other political forums (i.e. the EU and the UNHRC).[117] Since 2019, however, sensitive political issues have returned as a major topic in bilateral relations (see Chapter 1). Apart from some specific bilateral cases – like Sweden's Gui Minhai case – the resurgence of human rights issues has been driven (according to interviewees) by two key developments in China: the emergence of the Hong Kong pro-democracy protests midway into 2019 and the revelations of the internment camps for Uighurs and other Muslim minorities in Xinjiang in late 2019. Amid a general worsening of the (liberal) human rights situation in the PRC under Xi Jinping, these two issues have thus become a distinct source of deteriorating bilateral relations.

Second, the renewed focus on Chinese human rights violations and other sensitive issues has become *a major shared concern* among the BS6 (and most other Western) countries. To be sure, human rights concerns have continuously marred bilateral relations for the past three decades and specific bilateral relationships have periodically broken down because of 'Dalai Lama incidents'. But not since the Tiananmen Square massacre in 1989 have the BS6 countries (and its European partners) taken such a strong, vocal and united stance on these highly sensitive topics. This unity is evidenced, among other things, by the countries' support for the adoption, in late March 2021, of EU sanctions against several Chinese government officials in the Xinjiang province for their responsibility for human rights violations against the Uyghur Muslim minority – the first European sanctions against the PRC in more than 30 years.[118] Seeing themselves as staunch advocates of liberal human rights, the BS6 countries have recently taken a prominent role in putting Chinese human rights violations on the agenda within the EU and UNHRC (according to interviewees). Moreover, together with Norway and Iceland, the BS6 countries have also openly addressed these issues as a group. For instance, on 12 May 2021 the Nordic-Baltic countries issued a joint statement on 'the situation of the Uyghurs and

other Turkic Muslim minorities in Xinjiang', in which they expressed grave concerns and called on the Chinese government 'to facilitate immediate, meaningful and unfettered access to Xinjiang for all relevant UN special procedures and for the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights'.[119] Hence, these sensitive issues have recently come to dominate bilateral relations, triggering constant political confrontations between the foreign ministries and local Chinese embassies in all six countries (according to interviewees).

Third, the recurring confrontations over human rights and other sensitive issues highlights *differences* of political systems between the BS6 countries and the PRC. While the Chinese have long insisted on 'setting aside differences' and 'seeking common ground' in order to facilitate bilateral collaboration, the BS6 countries no longer seem to subscribe to that principle. Rather, as they increasingly find it necessary to raise sensitive topics and politicise differences of political systems, an atmosphere of distrust and suspicion has gradually come to prevail in bilateral relations which, in turn, generates insecurity. In other words, by constantly criticising China's authoritarian regime and highlighting differences of political systems, the BS6 countries are more likely to designate Chinese companies (and in effect China) as unreliable/untrustworthy partners, who ultimately pose a security threat. Hence, although a distinct development trend, the resurgence of human rights issues in bilateral relations may affect changing perceptions of China as a security threat as well.

SIMILARITIES ACROSS THE BS6: UNDERLYING STRUCTURAL DRIVERS

The final two sections reflect on similarities and differences in the BS6-PRC bilateral relationships over the past five years. As demonstrated in the previous chapters, there are important similarities across the BS6 countries, with bilateral relations having taken a downward turn in each country as security-related dynamics and sensitive political issues have come to dominate the bilateral agenda. It was argued in Chapter 1 that these similarities could be explained in terms of structural background conditions shared by the BS6 countries. That is, their position as small liberal-democratic EU member states allied/affiliated with the US is likely to shape their perceptions of and thus relations to the PRC. Since these structural conditions have existed for decades, however, it raises the question of why they have become increasingly important in determining the trajectory of bilateral relations. It is argued here that the two main drivers of the recent deterioration in bilateral relations – the shift in US China policy under the Trump administration and China's own development course under Xi Jinping – have been effective by accentuating existing structural dividing lines between the PRC and the BS6 countries.

The first main driver of the BS6 countries' changing perceptions of and deteriorating relations with the PRC is *the dramatic shift in US China policy* during the Trump administration. What started out in July 2018 as a trade war soon escalated into a full-scale confrontation across a range of other issue areas, the main components of which were outlined in a speech by Vice President Mike Pence in October 2018.[120] While the US hard-line approach over trade, geopolitics and ideology did not immediately involve the BS6 countries – given their sheltered position in the EU trade block, far away from the geopolitical arenas in the Indo-Pacific and their ideological distance to the Trump administration – the securitization campaign against Huawei conversely had direct implications for the BS6 countries as the Trump administration stepped up its diplomatic pressure on allies and partners to adopt similar measures (see Chapter 3). The diplomatic arm-twisting has been widely documented not only at a general European level,[121] but also in the case of individual BS6 countries.[122] Relying on the US as their key security provider (or partner in the case of Finland and Sweden), the BS6 countries in reality had to accept the securitization of Huawei because of the potential long-term security-related implications of 5G technology to their critical infrastructures. Washington's insistence on 'clean networks' of communication between allies and partners could hardly be ignored (see Chapter 3).

The second main driver is *China's own development course* under Xi Jinping. Back in 2016, it was still not obvious in what direction China was headed with Xi at the helm as general secretary of the CPC (since November 2012) and president of the PRC (since March 2013). Yet, by March 2018, an increasingly authoritarian development trend was evident to most Western observers as the party-controlled National People's Congress passed a set of constitutional amendments which, among other things, removed the term limit for the Chinese president amid a range of other steps to consolidate power around Xi.[123] Meanwhile, China's growing assertiveness in territorial disputes, notably its artificial island-building in the South China Sea and Beijing's denunciation of a ruling against it by the Permanent Court of Arbitration in the Hague, had become a matter of concern even among European countries.[124] Yet, the main factor behind shifting perceptions – according to the interviewees – seems to be the hardening of the Chinese regime under Xi Jinping with respect to its handling of liberal human rights issues, notably the pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong and the repression of the Uyghurs in the Xinjiang province. Hence, since 2019 the scope of Chinese human rights violations has been so alarming to the BS6 governments that their perceptions of the PRC have changed in a fundamental way.

Taken together, these two development trends – the far more confrontational US-China policies and the hardening of the Chinese regime under Xi Jinping – have

served to highlight the 'structural divide' between the BS6 countries and the PRC, thereby prompting the deterioration of bilateral relations. Since the interviewees also specifically referred to these two development trends, the temporal correlation between them and the observed changes in the BS6 countries seem to be further corroborated. As neither Washington, nor Beijing, seems about to change course, these drivers will continue to shape the BS6 countries' bilateral relations with the PRC.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE BS6: COUNTRY-SPECIFIC FACTORS

Even though they share a number of increasingly important structural conditions, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania and Sweden all have their own country-specific characteristics and foreign policy tradition, which also affect their bilateral relations with Beijing. The BS6 therefore is far from a uniform group. For example, Finland and Lithuania have taken rather different approaches over the past five years as already suggested in the previous chapters. Helsinki has been least susceptible among the BS6 to the US securitization discourse, it has been one of the least vocal critics of Beijing on sensitive human rights issues, and it has generally looked to Brussels for policy guidance in China-related questions (see Chapter 1). Vilnius, on the other hand, has recently taken a highly proactive stance in tackling China-related security risks, it has crossed Beijing's red lines on several sensitive topics, and it has accordingly received public backing from the US government.[125] In order to account for these differences, several country-specific factors seem relevant.

First, as close US allies, Denmark and the Baltic countries seem to have been somewhat more willing to accommodate US security-related interests than Finland and Sweden: Copenhagen by swiftly and explicitly accepting the securitization of Huawei, and the Baltics by signing on to similarly phrased declarations on 5G security that places them firmly in the US camp. Helsinki and Stockholm have conversely given Brussels a prominent role in their official 'China strategies' even if, in practice, EU coordination has had little impact in the case of 5G security (notably for Sweden).[126]

Second, whereas some of the BS6 countries have a long tradition of speaking up about human rights violations in other countries, others prefer to promote these issues more discreetly during closed-door multilateral meetings. As Beijing is known for punishing its most open critics, the Swedish government's persistent efforts to raise awareness of the Gui Minhai case and its high profile on other sensitive human rights issues go some way to explain the very poor relationship between Stockholm

and Beijing. Latvia's less public stance on sensitive topics can help explain why its bilateral relationship with China has not been quite as adversely affected.

Third, specific incidents have played a major negative role in some of the bilateral relationships (see Chapter 1). Apart from Sweden's Gui Minhai case, the incident in Lithuania on 23 August 2019 involving the Chinese embassy was a watershed moment in changing both popular and political perceptions of the PRC. For its part, Denmark has recently clashed several times with China, including over the demand for an apology because of a satirical cartoon in *Jyllands-Posten* and the erection, in front of the Danish parliament, of a 'pillar of shame' in solidarity with the Hong Kong protesters.

Fourth, a change of government can also suddenly wreak havoc on bilateral relations, as suggested in the case of the new Simonyte government in Lithuania.

Finally, since economic opportunities have always been a key driver behind engagement and collaboration with the PRC, it would be reasonable to assume that economic factors can also help explain some of the observed differences. Yet, as shown in Table 1, the BS6 countries' relative trade dependence on China varies only to a significant degree *between* the Nordic and Baltic states, while those countries whose bilateral relations with China have deteriorated the most/least (e.g. Finland and Latvia in the latter respect) are found on either side of this trade-related dividing line. Apart from trade, economic investments might also be of relevance, but available data suggest that this is not the case.[127] In fact, Chinese foreign direct investments have been substantial only in Finland and Sweden, which has not prevented relations between Stockholm and Beijing from collapsing. This is not to suggest that economic opportunities have become irrelevant for bilateral relations between the BS6 countries and the PRC. Rather, economic factors can hardly account for the observed differences in the recent development trajectories of bilateral relations.

All things considered, there are a number of country-specific factors that can help explain why the BS6 countries, to some extent, differ from one another with respect to the recent development of their bilateral relationship with China. However, as demonstrated in Chapters 1-3, the similarities are quite remarkable over the past five-year period, with all six countries having seen a deterioration of bilateral relations as security-related concerns and sensitive political topics have come to dominate the agenda.

CONCLUSION

This report has investigated emerging threat perceptions of China in the Baltic Sea region by conducting a comparative analysis of six countries: Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania and Sweden (the BS6). Known for coordinating their policy positions among themselves (together with Norway and Iceland), these six countries offer a specific Nordic-Baltic perspective on the rise of China within the EU. Moreover, given their position as small liberal democracies and allies/partners of the United States, these countries are similar to one another in several important structural respects that are likely to shape their relations to Beijing as the US-China great power rivalry deepens. Indeed, the report has documented significant similarities across the BS6 countries over the past five-year period. Perceptions of the PRC have changed fundamentally in all six countries, as security-related concerns and sensitive political topics have come to dominate their bilateral relations with Beijing. The observed deterioration of bilateral relations has been particularly noticeable since 2019 when the Trump administration embarked on its securitization campaign against Huawei, followed by the eruption of pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong and the revelations of massive human rights violations in Xinjiang.

The report traced changing threat perceptions since 2017 in the annual risk and threat assessment reports by the state security and intelligence agencies in the BS6 countries. While barely mentioned as a domestic concern in the reports back in 2017, the PRC is now perceived as a national security threat, thereby instilling a new sense of cautiousness and distrust into the bilateral relationships between the BS6 and the PRC. Specifically, most of the BS6 countries share a perception of China as a threat, direct or indirect, to their liberal freedoms as Beijing seeks to exert 'opinion control' in various ways to quell criticism of its assertive and repressive practices or prevent sensitive political issues from being addressed. Moreover, the BS6 countries view the PRC as a security-related threat to their critical infrastructures, notably with respect to 5G and digital communication networks.

The report then took a closer look at how the BS6 countries have handled the issue of 5G security as the Trump administration embarked on a securitization campaign against Huawei (China) and, from late 2018, exerted mounting pressure on US allies and partners to stop using Huawei's equipment. The report explored the different approaches pursued by the BS6 governments, with some countries (Denmark and Sweden) targeting Huawei quite explicitly, some (Denmark and Estonia) moving faster than others to accommodate US pressure, some (the Baltic countries) issuing bilateral strategic commitments together with Washington, some (Denmark and Sweden) granting their state intelligence agencies a critical decision-making role and some (notably Finland) preferring to treat the issue of 5G security largely as a technical issue. However, it has also demonstrated that, with the exception of Finland, the BS6 countries have accepted the US securitization discourse and adopted extraordinary measures to prevent Huawei from having any stake in the rollout of their 5G networks and thereby China from exerting influence over their critical digital infrastructure. Moreover, security-related concerns are currently spilling over into other areas of bilateral relations between China and the BS6 countries, with Lithuania recently taking a highly proactive stance.

The report has shown how bilateral relations between the BS6 countries and the PRC are currently being disrupted not only by security-related dynamics, but also the resurgence of human rights and other sensitive political issues, which constitutes an important parallel development trend. Notably since 2019, the Chinese government's systematic human rights violations have become a major shared concern among the BS6 countries, highlighting fundamental differences of political systems and eroding any political trust between the two sides. Based on the comparative analysis, the report finally argues that changing perceptions of the PRC and the deterioration of bilateral relationships have primarily been prompted by the dramatic shift in 2018 in the Trump administration's China policy as well as the hardening of the Chinese regime under Xi Jinping as these two development trends have served to highlight the 'structural divide' between the BS6 countries and the PRC. Even so, noticeable differences still exist in how each of the BS6 countries approach Beijing, some of which can be explained by the presence/absence of specific bilateral conflicts over the past few years.

NOTES

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3 **https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/communication-eu-china-a-strategic-outlook.pdf**

4 Andreas Bøje Forsby, 'Danish-Chinese Relations: Business-As-Usual or Strategic Disruption', in *Danish Foreign Policy Review 2020*, ed. by Kristian Fischer and Mouritzen Hans (Copenhagen: Danish Institute for International Studies, 2020), **https://pure.diis.dk/ws/files/4581154/DIIS_Review_2020.pdf**

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6 See **https://www.routledge.com/China-and-Nordic-Diplomacy/Sverdrup-Thygeson-Lindgren-Lanteigne/p/book/9781138501034**

7 Instead, an expert interview was conducted on China-Lithuania relations.

8 For an introduction to the mainstream constructivist perspective on international relations, see e.g. Emanuel Adler, 'Constructivism in International Relations: Sources, Contributions, and Debates', in *Handbook of International Relations*, ed. by Walter Carlsnaes, Thomas Rissa and Beth A. Simmons (London: Sage, 2013), 112-144.

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12 The following accounts of the bilateral relationships are based on the interviews as well as various secondary sources referenced below.

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15 This section draws on Bart Gaens and Jyrki Kallio, 'Finland's relations with China and the US', in *Europe in the Face of US-China Rivalry*, ETNC report, 2020: **https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/etnc_report_us-china-europe_january_2020_complete.pdf**

16 "Governmental Action Plan on China", *Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland*: **https://um.fi/documents/35732/0/Finland%27s+Governmental+Action+Plan+on+China+2021.pdf/36948194-7f39-fbf1-328e-666f8fc0f192?t=1623934391697**

17 This section draws on Una Bērziņa-Čerenkova, 'Latvians Still Believe in Economic Cooperation with China', *Choice*, 26 April 2021: **https://chinaobservers.eu/go-with-the-devil-you-dont-know-latvians-still-believe-in-economic-cooperation-with-china/**; and Andrijauskas et al., *Empty Shell No More*.

18 This section draws on Konstantinas Andrijauskas, *The Dragon and the Knight: China's Growing Presence in Lithuania*, Eastern Europe Studies Centre, 2020: **https://www.eesc.lt/uploads/news/id1137/v07_Dragon-and-Knight_leidinys_A4.pdf**; and Konstantinas Andrijauskas, *Sino-Lithuanian Relations in 2020*, Institute of International Relations and Political Science, 2020: **https://www.eesc.lt/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/SINO-LITHUANIAN-RELATIONS.pdf**.

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20 'Approach to Matters Relating to China', Swedish government communication, 26 September 2019: **https://www.government.se/4adb19/contentassets/e597d50630fa4eaba140d28fb252c29f/government-communication-approach-to-matters-relating-to-china.pdf**

21 Whereas the previous London communiqué only mentions China once, the new Brussels communiqué dedicates two paragraphs to discussing 'China's systemic challenges to the rules-based international order'. See 'Brussels Summit Communiqué', North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 14 June 2021: **https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_185000.htm**

22 As the Danish Security and Intelligence Service (PET) focuses almost entirely on the threat from domestic terrorism, the annual reports from the Danish Defense Intelligence Service (FE) were selected instead.

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24 **https://www.valisluureamet.ee/doc/raport/2021-en.pdf** (p. 69)

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26 **https://www.sakerhetspolisen.se/download/18.4ffee9b31787cb4eddc4ec/1624002656682/Swedish%20security%20service%20annual%20report2020.pdf** (p. 16)

27 **https://www.valisluureamet.ee/doc/raport/2021-en.pdf** (p. 78)

28 This definition (author's own) makes it easier to distinguish between 'opinion control' and 'influence activities', where the latter can be seen as less assertive attempts at shaping the image of China (i.e. by using carrots such as economic inducements rather than sticks).

29 **https://www.sakerhetspolisen.se/download/18.4ffee9b31787cb4eddc4ec/1624002656682/Swedish%20security%20service%20annual%20report2020.pdf** (p. 25)

30 Björn Jerdén and Viking Bohman, 'China's Propaganda Campaign in Sweden, 2018–2019', UI brief 4, 2019: **https://www.ui.se/globalassets/ui.se-eng/publications/ui-publications/2019/ui-brief-no.-4-2019.pdf**

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32 Forsby, 'Danish-Chinese Relations'.

33 **https://www.fe-ddis.dk/link/7aff4f3b18dd425e91a48531d66af88d.aspx** (p. 35)

34 **https://www.vsd.lt/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/2021-EN-el_.pdf** (p. 15)

35 Andrijauskas, 'The Dragon and the Knight', pp. 14-16.

36 **https://www.vsd.lt/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/2021-EN-el_.pdf** (p. 14)

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39 For an overview, see Frank Jüris, 'China's Influence Activities in Estonia', Estonian Foreign Policy Institute brief, September 2020: **https://icds.ee/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/ICDS_EFPI_Brief_Chinas_Influence_Activities_in_Estonia_Frank_Juris_September_2020.pdf**

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42 https://www.valisluureamet.ee/doc/raport/2021-en.pdf (p. 77)

43 https://www.sakerhetspolisen.se/download/18.4ffee9b31787cb4eddc4ec/1624002656682/Swedish%20security%20service%20annual%20report2020.pdf (p. 9)

44 https://www.fe-ddis.dk/link/7aff4f3b18dd425e91a48531d66af88d.aspx (p. 46)

45 See the special issue of *Internasjonal Politikk* 78(1) for an overview of how and when these concerns emerged in Denmark, Finland and Sweden: https://tidsskriftet-ip.no/index.php/intpol/issue/view/214

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49 See Barry Buzan et al., *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (London: Lynne Rienner, 1998).

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62 Ibid., p. 16.

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133 The 2018 report only suggests that China is on its way to become a national security threat.

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