



China Reform Monitor No. 1410

March 23, 2020 **Joshua Eisenman**

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CHINA-SWEDEN RELATIONS TAKE A NOSEDIVE

Bilateral relations between China and Sweden are deteriorating as Swedish cities and universities pull back from cooperation with Chinese counterparts. Vasteras has ended a government-funded dialogue project with Jinan; Lulea has halted a collaboration with Xi'an; Bengtsfors has "downgraded" its cooperation with Wuzhou; and Lulea University closed its Confucius Institute after it was accused of pushing propaganda. "We decided to stop it right now. There was one situation when we started in 2013. During the last years, the repression has been much harder in China," said Vasteras' mayor, Anders Teljeback. China's harsh rhetoric against Sweden has shocked politicians at all levels.

The rift stems from a fight over Gui Minhai, a Hong Kong-based book seller and Swedish citizen. After restoring Gui's PRC citizenship (ostensibly upon his request), Ningbo Intermediate People's Court sentenced him to 10 years in prison on charges of "endangering national security" and illegally providing intelligence to overseas parties. After Sweden's culture minister handed a literary prize to Gui Minhai's daughter, Angela Gui, China's ambassador said the country was a 48kg boxer challenging a 86kg heavyweight and threatened it with "consequences." In response, several opposition parties, including the Sweden Democrats and Christian Democrats, called for China's ambassador to be declared persona non grata. Last month, Sweden's media industry umbrella group criticized "in the strongest terms possible" China's attacks on press freedom, and said it is "unacceptable that the world's largest dictatorship is trying to prevent free and independent journalism in a democracy like Sweden." David Lega, Sweden's representative in the European Parliament, said: "We can't continue to accept everything China does without it having consequences. I refuse to sacrifice our values for economic reasons." (*Financial Times*, February 25, 2020)

CHINA'S AMBASSADOR RAILS AGAINST NORWAY'S FOKUS 2020

The 128-page Fokus 2020 report – the net assessment of Norway's intelligence services regarding current threats the country is facing – has laid out in detail the security challenges China poses to the country's digital infrastructure. China is mentioned 177 times in the report, which says that Beijing is using its development projects all over the world to lay the groundwork for massive global intelligence collection capacity. China's tools include its 5G network, fiber cables, and smart city systems, which can gather data. China's Ambassador to Norway, Yi Xianliang, has responded angrily to the depiction. "This report is completely void of facts. This is prejudice," Yi told attendees at the annual Kirkenes Conference. "China is generally described as a threat or potential threat. That is not true." Fokus 2020 stresses that China has abandoned its strategy of maintaining a low international profile and is now acting like a traditional big power. (*High North News*, February 18, 2020)

PRC ASYLUM APPLICATIONS TO GERMANY DOUBLE IN A YEAR

The number of PRC citizens seeking asylum in Germany has more than doubled, from 447 in 2018 to 962 applications in 2019. The situation has been getting "considerably worse" for minorities in China, a fact which Berlin believes is reflected in the percentages of asylum applications that are being granted. Since 2016, there has been an "alarming increase in the repression measures, control and discrimination" against Uighurs, according to a German foreign office report. Asylum claims from Uighurs rose from 68 in 2018 to 193 in 2019. Uighur and Tibetan applications had a 96% and 75% acceptance rate, respectively, compared to less than the 15% for Han applicants. (*Deutsche Welle*, February 16, 2020)

U.S.-BACKED CANDIDATE FOR UN TOP IPR POST BEATS OUT PRC CANDIDATE

After weeks of wrangling over the UN's top intellectual property protection post, the U.S.-backed candidate, Daren Tang, who currently heads Singapore's intellectual property office, has beaten out China's nominee, Wang Binying. Tang, who won 55 of the 83 votes cast, will become director general of the World Intellectual Property Organization (IPO). The IPO has seen rapid growth; in 2018, it received more than 250,000 new patent applications. France's ambassador in Geneva, François Rivasseau, hailed the result as "an important vote for the rule of law." U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said Tang is "an effective advocate for protecting intellectual property, a vocal proponent of transparency and institutional integrity." A PRC spokesman criticized the U.S. for "pressuring other countries to give up their support for the Chinese candidate." Chinese representatives already head four UN organizations including Food and Agriculture, International Civil Aviation, Industrial Development and International Telecom – no other country leads more than one. (*New York Times*, March 5, 2020)

CHINA IS CONVERTING INTERNET DOMAINS INTO "CONTENT FARMS"

Taiwan's Ministry of Justice Investigation Bureau (MJIB) has identified more than a dozen internet domains previously held by Taiwanese citizens that were obtained by China-based entities six months before last January's presidential elections. Several of the Taiwanese web address owners said their domains had been transferred to Chinese interests because they had "management problems" or "forgot to pay necessary fees." Worldwide, China-controlled groups now control 1,500 websites, which the MJIB describes as "content farms" that spread fake news and propaganda into independent websites and Facebook groups. In Taiwan, "the websites formed a channel through which China could infiltrate public opinion in Taiwan, inserting misleading reports to incite discussion and create confusion," said the MJIB. (*Taiwan News*, March 6, 2020)