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Related Categories: Democracy and Governance; International Economics and Trade; Baltics; China; Israel; Southeast Asia; Taiwan

LATVIA, ESTONIA LEAVE CHINA'S EAST EUROPE FORUM

Latvia and Estonia have left the China-backed 16+1 Forum, which is aimed at building relations with Eastern European countries. "In view of the current priorities of Latvian foreign and trade policy, Latvia has decided to cease its participation in the cooperation framework," read a statement from the country's Foreign Ministry. A statement from Estonia, which joined the Forum in 2012 but had not attended its meetings since February, said that it would continue to "advance EU-China relations in line with the rules-based international order and values such as human rights." The moves come after China retaliated, both economically and diplomatically, against Lithuania for expanding ties with Taiwan, and amid Beijing's support for Russia, whose invasion of Ukraine may be a prelude to attacks on other former Soviet states. China did not comment on the decision, but a State Department spokesperson called Latvia and Estonia "valued NATO allies and key U.S. partners." (Associated Press, August 12, 2022)

LITHUANIAN DEPUTY MINISTER VISITS TAIWAN

Lithuania's Deputy Minister of Transport and Communications, Agne Vaiciukeviciute, has concluded a five-day visit to Taipei. While there, she emphasized economic ties with Taiwan and endorsed the G7 and European Union statements criticizing China's nearby military exercises. "Lithuania is a democracy. Taiwan is our very close friend, and Taiwan is a booming economy. Lithuania chooses to cooperate with countries that are willing to cooperate with us. So, Taiwan is one of those countries and they are reliable partners," Vaiciukeviciute said. In response to the visit, China's Foreign Ministry suspended all "exchanges and cooperation with Lithuania in the area of international roadway transport." Beijing has already banned trade with Lithuania, prompting the EU to bring a dispute against China in the World Trade Organization. (Associated Press, August 12, 2022)

SRI LANKA ALLOWS PLA SPY SHIP TO DOCK AT HAMBANTOTA PORT

Despite India's protests, Sri Lanka has allowed China's controversial Yuan Wang 5 research vessel to dock at the Chinese-run Hambantota port. New Delhi insists that the ship, which can track space satellites and assist in intercontinental ballistic missile launches, is there to spy on its military. The Yuan Wang 5 was originally due to arrive on August 11th, but Colombo asked Beijing to indefinitely defer the visit following India's objections. China, however, denied the request, prompting Sri Lanka's foreign ministry to reconfirm the ship's permission to call at Hambantota from August 16th to 22nd. Colombo first approved the ship's visit on July 12th, the day before former president Gotabaya Rajapaksa fled to Singapore following months of protests. (BBC, August 16, 2022)

FEWER CHINESE STUDENTS HEADING TO THE U.S.

In the first six months of 2022, U.S. student visas issued to Chinese nationals fell by more than 50% compared to pre-pandemic levels. But the U.S. is not limiting the number of visas; rather, China's "Zero-COVID" restrictions and growing unfavorable opinions of the U.S. appear to be the key drivers for the slowdown. Prior to the pandemic, a growing number of Chinese students had chosen to study in the U.S.: in 2003-2004, the figure was 61,765, by 2009-2010 it had risen to 127,628 and by 2019-2020 the number of Chinese students in the U.S. stood at 372,532. (Bloomberg, August 15, 2022)

CPC WARNS ISRAEL: DON'T GET "DRAGGED" INTO U.S.-CHINA POLICY

Liu Jianchao, Minister of the International Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, has told Israeli Ambassador to Beijing Irit Ben-Abba not to allow pressure from Washington to damage bilateral relations. "This is a critical test point for the relations between China and Israel," Liu said, adding that he hopes Israel will not align itself with U.S. policy toward China or get "dragged" into the U.S. position that China is committing genocide in Xinjiang. He said any claims of human rights abuses in China are baseless and that the PLA has not "fired a shot" in 40 years, while the U.S. has fought in Iraq and Afghanistan. "The Jewish people have a lot in common with the Chinese people. There is no reason for us to hurt each other. If Israel hurts China because of external pressure, it will be making the wrong policy decision," Liu said. (Axios, August 17, 2022)