

# Risky Business

## **Rethinking Research Cooperation and Exchange with Non-Democracies**

Strategies for Foundations, Universities, Civil Society Organizations, and Think Tanks

By ASENSA BAYKAL and THORSTEN BENNER

---

STUDY  
**October 2020**

---



We could not have written this study without the support of many who are active in the different fields we cover and who generously shared their perspectives and experiences with us. Janka Oertel, Mareike Ohlberg, Mikko Huotari, and Ricardo Soares de Oliveira in particular provided input at crucial stages of the research process. In general, we benefited immensely from the possibility to learn from the colleagues at MERICS through various collaboration efforts. We would also like to thank the experts who agreed to serve as background interviewees as well as all those who participated in our initial workshop on September 18, 2019.

At GPPi, Julian Philippi played a key role during the kick-off workshop and initial research phase for this study. In addition, our colleagues Julia Friedrich, Alexander Gaus and Janika Spannagel provided very helpful comments on the first draft. Julia Friedrich and Karolin Tuncel contributed to our research on Russia and Turkey.

At Stiftung Mercator, Michael Schwarz encouraged us to tackle this topic and was extremely supportive throughout the entire process. Daniel Grütjen was a great help and a generous sparring partner in getting this project across the finish line. (He also showed considerable patience with our delays.) Our thanks is also due to Jennifer Hecht who helped guide our final steps in the process.

A special thank you goes to the communications teams at Stiftung Mercator and GPPi. At GPPi, Sonya Sugrobova and Amanda Pridmore helped with the rollout of the study. Moreover, we could not have finished it without Katharina Nachbar who worked tirelessly to get the final product into shape both in terms of the language and layout (and made sure it has a catchy title).

The views expressed in this study are those of the authors and do not reflect institutional positions of GPPi or Stiftung Mercator.

# Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	4
Paradigm Lost	4
Radical Cuts or Business as Usual? Both Responses Are Misguided	6
Rethinking Cooperation	8
<b>The Basics: Values and Red Lines</b>	11
Values	11
Red Lines	14
<b>Risks of Cooperation</b>	16
Dependence	16
(Self-)Censorship	22
Instrumentalization	23
Repression	26
Involuntary Technology Transfer and Espionage	29
Dual Use	30
Path Dependence	32
Indiscriminate Targeting	32
<b>Strategies and Instruments</b>	35
Understand the Context	35
Invest in Due Diligence	37
Expand Security Protections	38
Improve Cooperation Procedures	41
Build a Culture of Integrity	44
Stand for and Live Your Values	47
Share and Disseminate Knowledge	50
<b>Outlook</b>	53

# Introduction

## **Paradigm Lost**

For a quarter of a century after the end of the Cold War, Europe, the US and the West as a whole saw themselves clearly on the right – and winning – side of history. The assumption held by most in the early 1990s went something like this: The model of liberal democracy, market economy and open society was now without challenge and would continue to spread around the world. Never mind that the world’s most populous autocracy had massacred peaceful pro-democracy protesters on Tiananmen Square just before the Berlin Wall fell. The dominant expectation was that the remaining autocracies were all on an inevitable path toward democracy and a free market economy. The economic and normative pull of the ‘Western model’ would prove irresistible. One way to speed up that process of opening was through cooperation between universities, think tanks, foundations, and civil society organizations (CSOs) in the West and their counterparts in authoritarian contexts like China, the Middle East or the countries of the former Soviet Union. The assumption was that such cooperation would strengthen like-minded actors in these settings, who were already pushing for their countries to become more open. “Democratic change through engagement” was the basic theory of change underpinning these efforts.

It is not surprising, then, that most actors from open societies approached their efforts to engage with partners in non-democracies during the first decades of the post-Cold War era with great optimism and confidence. Very few expressed concerns about the potential risks of such cooperation, and even fewer considered the necessary safeguards against possible risks. After all, partners in non-democracies were expected to eventually adapt the core values of open societies. That counterparts representing the state apparatus and related institutions in non-democracies might actually pursue their very own agendas – agendas not aligned with these values – seemed a far-fetched or at least irrelevant prospect to most.

Today, it is clear that these assumptions were overly optimistic. In recent years, rather than opening up, non-democracies such as China have become even more closed and authoritarian. Similarly, despite an initial period of opening in the 1990s, Russia has not transformed into a democracy and open society. Other countries that were on a path of democratizing (such as Turkey) have also seen a relapse into more authoritarian rule. Even in the middle of the European Union (EU), in Hungary, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán has been on a quest to create what he proudly calls an “illiberal state.” If we cannot even prevent the emergence of an authoritarian government within the EU, we can certainly no longer assume that cooperation and dialogue necessarily contribute to an opening of non-democracies.

In fact, in many cases we are witnessing the opposite: consolidated or consolidating non-democracies. Research cooperation and dialogue and exchange programs need to come to terms with these developments. By extension, universities, think tanks, foundations, and other CSOs need to revisit and recalibrate the underlying

assumptions on which they operate. At the same time, we must take into account the fact that representatives of non-democracies often pursue their own goals in research cooperation or dialogue and exchange ventures with great self-confidence. Official representatives and institutions from non-democracies are not like-minded partners. They act based on their own interests and principles, which may significantly diverge from those of their counterparts in open societies. Their basic rationale is to improve the conditions that ensure the continuation of their own rule.

This may seem like a truism, but the assumption that the world would inevitably move toward liberal democracy and an open model of society meant that for a long time we did not see a need to put ourselves into the shoes of our counterparts representing non-democracies and to see the world with their eyes. For example, the expectation that only free and open societies could innovate and develop into high-income economies led many to believe that it had to be in the interest of Beijing and other authoritarian governments to increase academic freedom so as to spur innovation. That a country could be both deeply authoritarian and innovative was not part of the Western imagination post-1989. However, in recent years the Chinese party-state has demonstrated that a country can indeed advance technologically while at the same time reversing the meager prior gains in academic freedom and cracking down on freedom of expression. What is more, that very scientific and technological success in turn creates incentives for cooperation with partners from democracies – especially in the natural sciences – who seek to benefit from access to China’s scientific talent and treasure trove of data.

Today, when working with official counterparts from non-democracies, universities, think tanks, foundations, and NGOs frequently encounter self-confident players with a clear agenda who are often advocating principles that run counter to those of open societies. In addition, non-democracies now also offer funding opportunities to universities and think tanks in democracies (such as Confucius Institutes, funded chairs or project funding) as well as individual scholars from democracies (such as lucrative visiting scholar positions at research institutions in non-democracies). A number of national university systems (especially in the UK, Australia and the US) increasingly depend on fees paid by students from non-democracies. This all creates channels of influence from non-democracies into open societies. At home, non-democracies have tightened the screws on foreign NGOs, foundations, think tanks, and universities by limiting their ability to run their own programs or have representative offices or campuses that can operate independently. States like China have also realized that access is a currency they can use as leverage and weaponized the granting of visas to reward ‘good’ behavior – or to punish behavior they see as going against their interests.

Of course, universities, think tanks, foundations, and NGOs can still find many like-minded partners in non-democracies. But the space for these partners to operate freely has shrunk dramatically in recent years. Many are now subject to government surveillance, tight controls and constant public attacks. Given these dire conditions, like-minded partners in non-democratic contexts deserve external support more than ever. At the same time, organizations in democracies need to make sure that cooperation does not increase the risk that partners will have to face (even more) government repression. Too many of them have already been silenced. And some academics, human rights lawyers, and civil society and democracy activists find

themselves in prison in Turkey, Russia, China, Hong Kong, and elsewhere.<sup>1</sup> In addition, foreign researchers and NGO workers increasingly need to fear for their safety and freedom, too. The government of Iran, for instance, regularly takes foreign academics as hostages under false charges of espionage to put political pressure on their home countries in other, usually unrelated areas.<sup>2</sup> But it is no longer just Iran engaging in such “hostage diplomacy.”<sup>3</sup> By arresting Michael Kovrig, a Canadian researcher for the think tank International Crisis Group (ICG), in Beijing in December 2018, the Chinese government demonstrated that it does not shy away from holding foreign citizens hostage as a political weapon (in this case to put pressure on the Canadian government following the arrest of Huawei CFO Meng Wanzhou by Canadian authorities at the request of the US government). And recently, Chinese officials have sent warning signals that US citizens might face the same fate as Beijing’s Canadian hostages. The message was blunt: “The U.S. should drop prosecutions of the Chinese scholars in American courts, or Americans in China might find themselves in violation of Chinese law.”<sup>4</sup> Any activity aimed at strengthening cooperation between civil society organizations in liberal democracies and non-democracies needs to reflect this new risk.

## Radical Cuts or Business as Usual? Both Responses Are Misguided

At the moment, there are two dominant schools of thought on the failure of the “democratic change through engagement” paradigm: a radical cutting of ties and business as usual. Both are extreme and neither is appropriate.

The first calls for cutting all or at least most of the research ties and exchange programs with non-democracies, especially with highly consolidated authoritarian systems such as China. This is an extreme version of buyer’s remorse. Democratic change through engagement did not work as expected. What is more, it turns out that such cooperation comes with several risks, among them theft of intellectual property, espionage, dual-use technology, or the general infringement of rights. Some extreme skeptics also feel that individuals or organizations in non-democratic contexts are getting a lot more out of research cooperation and dialogue programs than their counterparts in liberal democracies. This has led some to the radical conclusion that it is better to stop cooperating altogether. The Trump administration, for example, decided to cut all Fulbright people-to-people academic exchange programs with China and Hong Kong. To put this move into perspective: the Fulbright program with China

- 
- 1 Scholars at Risk, “Academic Freedom Monitoring Project,” accessed October 20, 2019, <https://www.scholars-at-risk.org/actions/academic-freedom-monitoring-project/>.
  - 2 Laure Cailloce, “Roland Marchal: ‘I was an academic hostage,’” *CNRS News*, January 6, 2020, accessed October 19, 2020, <https://news.cnrs.fr/articles/roland-marchal-i-was-an-academic-hostage/>.
  - 3 Jason Rezaian, “Iran’s Hostage Factory,” *The Washington Post*, November 4, 2019, accessed October 19, 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2019/11/04/irans-hostage-factory/?arc404=true>.
  - 4 Kate O’Keeffe and Aruna Viswanatha, “China Warns U.S. It May Detain Americans in Response to Prosecutions of Chinese Scholars,” *The Wall Street Journal*, October 17, 2020, accessed October 19, 2020, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/china-warns-u-s-it-may-detain-americans-in-response-to-prosecutions-of-chinese-scholars-11602960959/>.

had run since the normalization of relations between the two countries in the 1970s.<sup>5</sup> The rationale for ending it had little to do with fears for the safety and security of the US citizens participating in these exchange programs. Rather, this was a tactical move that has to be understood in the context of a broader geopolitical confrontation between the US and China. Extreme voices see a cutting of all ties as a way to gain an advantage in that struggle.

The second approach promotes business as usual by clinging to the old paradigm. There are numerous examples for this. The German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), for instance, has been a vocal champion of academic freedom and offers crucial resources and expertise for those planning cooperation projects. And yet it abides by its motto “change by exchange” and still claims that “cooperation contributes to political and social progress.” However, with regard to China as well as quite a few other non-democracies there is little indication that cooperation does indeed contribute to “political progress.”<sup>6</sup> Similarly, in June 2020, the Brussels-based Center for European Policy Studies (CEPS) stated that “[b]ilateral people-to-people exchanges on education, for example, have helped assert the EU’s soft power among the most brilliant minds among China’s next generation.”<sup>7</sup> While there are good reasons to continue people-to-people exchange programs with China, it is a stretch to claim that they have successfully “asserted the EU’s soft power” among China’s next generation – unless one can provide concrete evidence for this.

In science cooperation, too, some still have illusions that everybody shares the noble view of scientific research as a borderless global endeavor. This ignores the many powerful decision-makers (in democracies as well as non-democracies) who see and use it as a tool of national statecraft. In 1888, at the inauguration of the Pasteur Institute, Louis Pasteur claimed that “[s]cience knows no country because knowledge belongs to humanity and it is the torch that illuminates the world.”<sup>8</sup> In this same spirit, while speaking to the German parliament in the middle of a global pandemic in 2020, German Chancellor Angela Merkel claimed: “[S]cience is never national. Science serves mankind.”<sup>9</sup> As desirable a normative statement as this is, it is of little use as a practical guide. Chinese President Xi Jinping, for instance, clearly sees science as serving the Chinese party-state, not all of mankind.<sup>10</sup> That is why it is misguided to start from the assumption that the approach to science in democratic and authoritarian systems

5 Eleanor Albert, “The Cost of Ending Fulbright in China,” *The Diplomat*, July 22, 2020, accessed October 19, 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/07/the-cost-of-ending-fulbright-in-china/>.

6 DAAD, “Motto,” accessed October 19, 2020, <https://www.daad.de/en/the-daad/who-we-are/motto/>.

7 CEPS, “EU-China relations post Covid-19 – challenges and opportunities,” June 18, 2020, accessed October 19, 2020, [https://www.ceps.eu/ceps-events/china-eu-relations-post-covid-19-challenges-and-opportunities/?mc\\_cid=6921fae504&mc\\_eid=90cba13b35/](https://www.ceps.eu/ceps-events/china-eu-relations-post-covid-19-challenges-and-opportunities/?mc_cid=6921fae504&mc_eid=90cba13b35/).

8 Patricia Gruver, “Science Belongs to Humanity... Or Does It?,” *Science and Innovation Network USA*, March 7, 2017, accessed October 19, 2020, <https://blogs.fcdo.gov.uk/scienceinnovationusa/2017/03/07/science-belongs-to-humanity-or-does-it/>.

9 Angela Merkel, “Regierungserklärung von Bundeskanzlerin Merkel,” *Die Bundeskanzlerin*, April 23, 2020, accessed October 19, 2020, <https://www.bundeskanzlerin.de/bkin-de/aktuelles/regierungserklaerung-von-bundeskanzlerin-merkel-1746554/>.

10 Ingrid d’Hooghe et al., “Assessing Europe-China Collaboration in Higher Education and Research,” Leiden Asia Centre, 2018, accessed October 19, 2020, <https://leidenasiacentre.nl/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/LeidenAsiaCentre-Report-Assessing-Europe-China-Collaboration-in-Higher-Education-and-Research.pdf>, p. 11.

is similar. However, former German Science Minister Annette Schavan, who now co-leads a Chinese-German dialogue forum, did exactly that when she stressed the similarities between Germany and China following the 2011 Chinese-German Year of Science (which had the motto “Together on the Path of Knowledge”). Schavan also claimed that the two countries were on a “good track to discover more similarities.”<sup>11</sup> In 2019, and in that same spirit, the German Academy of Sciences Leopoldina concluded an agreement with the Chinese Academy of Sciences. The agreement was marketed as “the oldest academy in the West and the strongest academy in the East” joining forces in what was named the *Beijing Declaration*. The text of the declaration even recycles a key trope of Chinese President Xi’s propaganda speak when it talks about a “clear vision of a common future for all of humankind.”<sup>12</sup> By agreeing to this, the “oldest academy in the West” handed the Chinese party-state a significant propaganda victory on a silver platter.

All too often, dialogue programs also still follow the logic that talking is always better than not talking.<sup>13</sup> While there are many good reasons for maintaining dialogue programs, this mantra conveniently allows to paper over instances or situations where open and honest discussions are no longer possible because freedom of speech has been severely restricted or no longer exists at all. Similarly, it has provided a convenient cover for universities and think tanks that continue to accept funding from non-democratic sources, compromising their integrity and independence.<sup>14</sup> Lastly, this mantra also disregards the fact that authoritarian actors increasingly seek to instrumentalize instances of “talking” for public diplomacy purposes and to legitimize their conduct, from territorial aggressions to human rights abuses.

## Rethinking Cooperation

Radical cuts and business as usual are both self-defeating strategies. The former deprive liberal democracies of important channels of cooperation that still serve important goals irrespective of whether or not non-democratic societies become more open. The latter recklessly exacerbates the risks that are inherent in cooperating with non-democracies and thus only hands more ammunition to those seeking to cut ties with non-democracies altogether.

More importantly, there is a different way. But it requires actors in liberal democracies to rethink and reaffirm their goals, values, red lines, risks, and strategies for research cooperation and dialogue programs with counterparts in non-democracies.

11 Annette Schavan, “Auf dem Weg des Wissens,” *Die Politische Meinung*, December 15, 2015, accessed October 2019, 2020, [https://www.kas.de/c/document\\_library/get\\_file?uuid=bd581f15-2a22-b91d-5a60-e8dcd3e-f54a9&groupId=252038/](https://www.kas.de/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=bd581f15-2a22-b91d-5a60-e8dcd3e-f54a9&groupId=252038/).

12 National Academy of Sciences Leopoldina and Chinese Academy of Sciences, *Beijing Declaration on Basic Science*, 2019, accessed October 2020, <https://www.leopoldina.org/en/publications/detailview/publication/beijing-declaration-on-basic-science-2019-1/>.

13 Klaus Segbers, “Kein Wandel durch Annäherung,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, July 21, 2020, accessed October 19, 2020, <https://zeitung.faz.net/faz/politik/2020-07-21/kein-wandel-durch-annaeherung/484333.html/>.

14 Thorsten Benner, “It’s Time for Think Tanks and Universities to Take the Democracy Pledge,” *The Washington Post*, January 16, 2019, accessed October 19, 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2019/01/16/its-time-think-tanks-universities-take-democracy-pledge/>.



And it must take into account the new environment in which “democratic change through cooperation” can no longer serve as reliable theory of change, and where organizations need to be mindful of the risks inherent in cooperation much more than ever before.

This study seeks to make a contribution to this process of rethinking. Our basic assumption is that even as the old presumed certainties of cooperation with non-democracies have evaporated there are still many worthy and achievable goals that research cooperation, dialogue and exchange programs can and should pursue. In fact, in this era of increasing geopolitical conflict, research cooperation and investments in cross-societal ties are in many ways more important than ever.<sup>15</sup> To start, dialogue and exchange programs enable a better understanding of the other side. Second, the cross-societal ties they build can serve as important channels in times of rising tensions. US researcher James Millward, one of the strongest voices for the rights of minorities in China, has argued that “maintaining cultural and academic relations with the PRC is now more important than ever.”<sup>16</sup> The same can be said for relations with other non-democracies. These are investments in “Völkerverständigung” (“understanding between peoples”) in the best sense of the term. Third, the current COVID-19 pandemic and the global climate emergency both exemplify the pressing need for extensive, international collaboration to safeguard global public goods. Despite heightening geopolitical tensions, the current pandemic has motivated worldwide research collaborations that we should build on.<sup>17</sup> Fourth, regardless of the loss of faith in the certainty of democratic transformation – or even because of it – there is a strong case for supporting like-minded players in non-democratic systems that stand up for the values of open societies. Table 1 (on the next page) provides an overview of the range of goals that research cooperation and exchange and dialogue activities can pursue.

If they want to be better able to achieve these goals, organizations need to reaffirm their values and the red lines that inform how they approach cooperation with partners in non-democracies. At the same time, they need to strengthen their awareness of the risks that are inherent in research cooperation and exchange programs with non-democracies. Doing so will allow them to put in place effective strategies and instruments to manage these risks while trying to maximize the intended benefits of cooperation. Fortunately, many organizations have already started to move in the direction of such a rethinking. This study seeks to support them in this endeavor while also helping to foster a broader public debate on this issue. To this end, we first discuss the importance of values and red lines (chapter 2) before turning to the potential risks of research cooperation and dialogue and exchange programs with non-democracies

15 This echoes some of the hopes for the side effects of science cooperation expressed in the literature on “science diplomacy.” See Pierre-Bruno Ruffini, “Conceptualizing science diplomacy in the practitioner-driven literature: a critical review,” *Humanities and Social Sciences Communication* 7 (2020), accessed October 19, 2020, <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41599-020-00609-5>.

16 James Millward, “The Uighurs’ suffering deserves targeted solutions, not anti-Chinese posturing,” *The Guardian*, July 27, 2020, accessed October 19, 2020, [https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/jul/27/the-uighurs-suffering-deserves-targeted-solutions-not-anti-chinese-posturing?CMP=Share\\_iOSApp\\_Other/](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/jul/27/the-uighurs-suffering-deserves-targeted-solutions-not-anti-chinese-posturing?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other/).

17 Jonathan Cheng, “As U.S., China Clash Over Coronavirus, Their Doctors Quietly Join Forces,” *The Wall Street Journal*, April 10, 2020, accessed April 16, 2020, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/as-u-s-china-clash-over-coronavirus-their-doctors-quietly-join-forces-11586516401?redirect=amp#click=https://t.co/wQKwSQ2gxq/>; Joyce Lau, “Coronavirus crisis inspiring ‘unprecedented’ global research effort,” *Times Higher Education*, March 25, 2020, accessed October 19, 2020, <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/coronavirus-crisis-inspiring-unprecedented-global-research-effort#survey-answer/>.

(chapter 3). In the final chapter (chapter 4), we outline a number of strategies that can help universities, foundations, think tanks, and NGOs improve their risk management while not losing sight of the goals that guide their cooperation activities.

Table 1: Goals of Research Cooperation and Exchange and Dialogue Activities with Non-Democracies

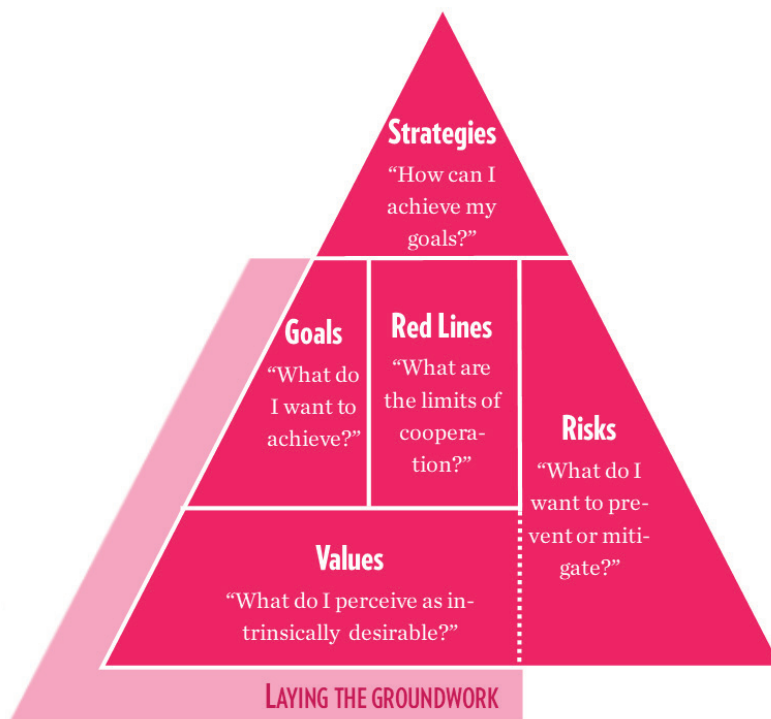
<b>1</b> Preserve and Promote	Academic freedom Research integrity Research quality Civil society Democracy Competitiveness Innovation potential Intellectual property Independence
<b>2</b> Support and Strengthen	Like-minded players
<b>3</b> Build and Develop	Understanding the other side Societal ties (that can serve as communication channels in geopolitically tense times) Political ties Joint/cooperative solutions to political, diplomatic and global problems Global knowledge

In this study, we focus on examples from cooperation with China, Russia and Turkey. We chose these countries because of their importance and prominence from a European perspective. China, Russia and Turkey are the key non-democracies that Europe interacts with in its research and exchange activities. Of the examples we use, the overwhelming majority are from cooperation with Chinese counterparts. This is due to the fact that there is a richer literature on cooperation with China and that in certain areas, for example in science cooperation, China is significantly more important than Russia or Turkey. The three countries also offer variation: China is a strongly consolidated authoritarian system, whereas Turkey and, to a lesser degree, also Russia have stronger elements of competition in their political systems.

# The Basics: Values and Red Lines

Any effort to cooperate with potential partners in non-democratic contexts needs to start from a place of clarity about values and red lines.

Figure 1: Roadmap for Strategic Cooperation



## Values

Values define the key principles that should undergird cooperation activities by organizations and individuals from democracies. An explicit awareness of key values is crucial not only to clarify one's goals but also to define the red lines that can guide decision-making in potential conflicts with cooperation partners. For universities, think tanks, foundations, and CSOs in liberal democracies, these values are rooted in the liberal democratic framework that, in turn, is informed by universal values like human rights. Like-minded partners in political systems that are different are bound to share many of these values. However, official counterparts in non-democracies are often likely to be guided by very different values (which in turn also constrains like-minded partners in non-democracies).

One way to deal with differences in or clashes between core values is to look for common ground, that is, principles on which both democracies and non-democracies can agree. One prominent advocate of this approach is Robin Niblett, director of Chatham House, the UK's leading foreign policy think tank. Niblett has called for a search for "principles for sustainable and effective national governance upon which think-tanks from different parts of the world might agree, so as to provide a sufficiently firm normative base on which they can work together."<sup>18</sup> The principles he suggests, however, fall short of what makes a full-fledged liberal democracy. As Niblett himself suggests, even those trimmed down principles of "sustainable and effective national governance" will at best be "aspirational for some (...) international partners. The goal, therefore, should be convergence towards these principles, as measured by outcomes, rather than *a priori* commitments to particular governance models."<sup>19</sup>

Watering down one's own principles in the meager hope for convergence is not a convincing approach. Apart from signaling an openness to funding from non-democratic sources, there is no compelling reason to default to sacrificing one's own values and principles. Representatives from non-democracies stand firmly by their own principles (not least because their governments officially expect them to). So they will not be surprised if their counterparts in democracies do the same – ideally in a self-critical manner that recognizes their own shortcomings. Actors from liberal democracies will not gain anything from preemptively backing down. The hope for convergence, as Niblett himself seems to recognize, is at best faint. If anything, rather than convergence the trend over the past decade seems to point to greater divergence between liberal democracies and non-democracies such as China and Russia. Non-democratic governments make choices about their own principles based on their own calculus that outsiders can only influence to a limited degree. A unilateral move by universities, think tanks, foundations, and NGOs in democracies to tone down their own principles will not make non-democracies more likely to move in the direction of greater openness.

That is why a different approach makes more sense. Universities, think tanks, foundations, and NGOs in liberal democracies should clearly articulate their own values and principles – without qualifications. Only then can they set out to navigate – and negotiate – the realities of cooperation in research, exchange and dialogue projects with their counterparts in non-democracies. The flipside of this is greater mindfulness of their own red lines: at each step of the way, actors in liberal democracies need to determine whether the benefits of a particular cooperation venture really outweigh the potential costs and drawbacks. We consider the following four clusters of values as particularly important in this context: human rights, academic freedom, research integrity, and diversity.

---

18 Robin Niblett, "Rediscovering a sense of purpose: the challenge for western think-tanks," *International Affairs* 94, no. 6 (2018), accessed October 19, 2020, <https://academic.oup.com/ia/article-abstract/94/6/1409/5162428?redirectedFrom=fulltext/>, pp.1409–1429.

19 Ibid.

## Human Rights

Rather than *a value* in itself, human rights are a *collection of values*. Any type of cooperation activity with partners in non-democracies should aim to protect human rights as defined and elaborated in the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.<sup>20</sup> This includes freedom of speech and freedom of association.<sup>21</sup> No cooperation endeavor should in any way whatsoever contribute to or be complicit in violating human rights. This should be the bedrock principle of any cooperation activity with non-democracies.

## Academic Freedom

Academic freedom is enshrined in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), which 171 (out of 193) UN member states are party to. Its article 15.3 obliges states to “undertake to respect the freedom indispensable for scientific research.” UNESCO’s Recommendation Concerning the Status of Higher-Education Teaching Personnel defines academic freedom as the “right, without constriction by prescribed doctrine, to freedom of teaching and discussion, freedom in carrying out research and disseminating and publishing the results thereof, freedom to express freely their opinion about the institution or system in which they work, freedom from institutional censorship and freedom to participate in professional or representative academic bodies.”<sup>22 23</sup> This is the professional core of academic freedom. Beyond that, academic freedom should also include the right of researchers to engage in broader societal debates outside their university or research institution.<sup>24</sup>

---

20 United Nations, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, December 1948, accessed October 19, 2020, <https://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>.

21 Joybrato Mukherjee, interview conducted by Thekla Jahn, “Eine freiheitlich-demokratische Grundordnung garantiert eine freie Wissenschaft,” *Deutschlandfunk*, February 12, 2020, accessed October 19, 2020, [https://www.deutschlandfunk.de/neuer-daad-praesident-eine-freiheitlich-demokratische.680.de.html?dram:article\\_id=470115/](https://www.deutschlandfunk.de/neuer-daad-praesident-eine-freiheitlich-demokratische.680.de.html?dram:article_id=470115/).

22 United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), *Recommendation concerning the Status of Higher-Education Teaching Personnel*, November 12, 1997, accessed October 19, 2020, <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000113234.locale=en/>.

23 Another important definition of academic freedom can be found in the latest general comment by the CESCR (the UN Committee tasked with monitoring the ICESCR): “This freedom includes, at least, the following dimensions: protection of researchers from undue influence on their independent judgment; their possibility to set up autonomous research institutions and to define the aims and objectives of the research and the methods to be adopted; the freedom of researchers to freely and openly question the ethical value of certain projects and the right to withdraw from those projects if their conscience so dictates; the freedom of researchers to cooperate with other researchers, both nationally and internationally; the sharing of scientific data and analysis with policymakers, and with the public, wherever possible.” See UN Economic and Social Council, *General comment No. 25 (2020) on science and economic, social and cultural rights* (articles 15 (1) (b), (2), (3) and (4) of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights), E/C.12/GC/25, April 30, 2020, accessed October 19, 2020, <https://undocs.org/E/C.12/GC/25>, §13, p. 3-4.

24 Felix Hoffmann and Katrin Kinzelbach call this „socially engaged academic freedom.” See Felix Hoffmann and Katrin Kinzelbach, “Forbidden Knowledge,” Global Public Policy Institute, April 2018, accessed October 19, 2020, [https://www.gppi.net/media/Kinzelbach\\_Hoffmann\\_2018\\_Forbidden\\_Knowledge.pdf/](https://www.gppi.net/media/Kinzelbach_Hoffmann_2018_Forbidden_Knowledge.pdf/), p. 7.

## Research Integrity

While academic freedom is a right, research integrity is a duty. According to All European Academies (ALLEA), the European Federation of Academies of Sciences and Humanities, research integrity includes four principles that form the foundation of good research practice:

1. **Reliability:** “ensuring the quality of research, reflected in the design, the methodology, the analysis and the use of resources”;
2. **Honesty:** conducting and communicating research in a “transparent, fair, full and unbiased way”;
3. **Respect:** for “colleagues, research participants, society, ecosystems, cultural heritage and the environment”;
4. **Accountability:** of research in every step.<sup>25</sup>

These principles should be implemented with regard to the research environment and procedures, training and mentoring activities, data practices and management, collaborative working, publication and dissemination activities, as well as during the process of reviewing, evaluating and editing research results. As ALLEA points out: “[F]ailing to follow good research practices violates professional responsibilities. It damages the research processes, degrades relationships among researchers, undermines trust in and the credibility of research, wastes resources and may expose research subjects, users, society or the environment to unnecessary harm.”

## Diversity

All cooperation activities with actors in non-democracies (and especially dialogue programs) should strive to be inclusive.<sup>26</sup> Diversity means including a range of different viewpoints and paying particular attention to the voices of marginalized groups, such as ethnic and religious minorities.

## Red Lines

In an interview in early 2020, the president of the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), Joybrato Mukherjee, stated that in an ideal world all cooperation partners would share the principles of academic freedom, freedom of press, freedom of speech,

---

25 ALLEA, *The European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity – Revised Version*, 2017, accessed October 19, 2020, <https://www.allea.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/ALLEA-European-Code-of-Conduct-for-Research-Integrity-2017.pdf>; Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung, *China-Strategie des BMBF 2015-2020*, 2015, accessed October 19, 2020, [https://innovation.uni-hohenheim.de/fileadmin/einrichtungen/interman/china\\_strategie\\_bmbf.pdf/](https://innovation.uni-hohenheim.de/fileadmin/einrichtungen/interman/china_strategie_bmbf.pdf/), p. 33.

26 See European Parliament, *European Parliament resolution of 12 September 2018 on the state of EU-China relations*, A8-0252/2018, September 12, 2018, accessed October 19, 2020, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-8-2018-0343\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-8-2018-0343_EN.html), which calls for the inclusion of different and independent voices.

and other rights and freedoms that are guaranteed in liberal democracies.<sup>27</sup> However, he continued, in reality many countries do not fully uphold these values. Mukherjee rightly argues that the consequence of this cannot be that democracies stop cooperating with these countries altogether. Rather, he maintains, “we need to expand our cooperation under adverse conditions and stand up for our values time and again.” Doing that is impossible without clear red lines.

A red line demarcates the realm of what is still tolerable before civil society actors in liberal democracies should decide to cancel an existing cooperation or to not pursue a new one. It defines what is permissible and what is not. Drawing a red line is a balancing act between allowing for the degree of compromise that is necessary to enable respectful, equal cooperation on the one hand and maintaining one’s integrity on the other hand. Based on interviews and discussions with experts and practitioners, we compiled the following list of key red lines:

- **Do no harm:** no cooperation when it puts individuals in danger;
- **Don’t allow censorship:** no cooperation formats where partners in non-democratic contexts do not allow for open discussions, censor work or silence individuals;
- **Don’t allow discrimination:** no cooperation when colleagues are discriminated against or excluded (e.g., in the form visa denials, exclusion from participation in events or blocked access to information) due to their race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, ethnicity, nationality, or political affiliation or opinions;
- **Don’t compromise integrity:** no sharing of data or other resources if it cannot be ensured that their production and storage conform to ethical standards;
- **Don’t cooperate with non-civilian actors:** no direct research cooperation with military actors and no research cooperation if effective safeguards on dual-use technology cannot be put in place.

This set of red lines can only constitute the bare minimum. Individual organizations in liberal democracies should add on to it based on their individual missions and the specific risks entailed in their cooperation projects.

---

27 Mukherjee, interview, February 12, 2020.

# Risks of Cooperation

## Dependence

A growing number of organizations in liberal democracies, especially universities and think tanks, are increasingly dependent on material and immaterial resources flowing to them from non-democracies. Some research institutes rely on funding in the form of research and projects grants from non-democracies (partly channeled through state-owned or nominally private companies), while tuition-based university systems often depend on the fees paid by students from non-democracies. Non-monetary resources, such as access to scientific infrastructures or a national market, can also create dependencies that expose organizations to other kinds of risks.<sup>28</sup>

Given the pressures of a highly competitive global higher education market and the limited public funding for higher education in many countries, it is hardly surprising that universities and also think tanks have opened up to funding from non-democracies.<sup>29</sup> Reflections on the motives of funders from non-democratic states or the potential ethical implications of accepting money from non-democracies often do not get enough room.<sup>30</sup> In the case of China, funds granted by government-affiliated entities serve the long-term strategic goals of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). The nominally independent non-governmental organization China-United States Exchange Foundation (CUSEF), which is headquartered in Hong Kong, provides considerable funding for professorships at US universities and research projects in US think tanks. Its head, Tung Chee-Hwa, has links to the United Front Work Department, a CCP body tasked with expanding the party-state's influence.<sup>31</sup> CUSEF's cooperation partners include the School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS) at Johns Hopkins University as well as well-known US think tanks like the Atlantic Council.<sup>32</sup> By funneling money into think tanks, non-democratic actors aim to shape foreign policy debates in liberal democracies. Over the past decade, the Turkish government and private businesses that are beholden to it have repeatedly donated funds to the

---

28 For an in-depth overview, see Clive Hamilton and Mareike Ohlberg, *Hidden Hand: Exposing How the Chinese Communist Party is Reshaping the World*, London: Oneworld Publications, 2020, chapter 12.

29 Risto Rinne and Jenni Koivula, "The Changing Place of the University and a Clash of Values: The Entrepreneurial University in the European Knowledge Society – A Review of Literature," *OECD Higher Education Management and Policy* 17 no. 3 (2005): pp. 91-123, accessed October 19, 2020, <http://www.oecd.org/education/imhe/42348745.pdf>, p. 111.

30 Christopher Hughes, "Confucius Institutes and the university: distinguishing the political mission from the cultural," *Issues and Studies* 50 no. 4, (2014): 45-83, accessed October 19, 2020, <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/35434291.pdf>, p. 47.

31 Bethany Allen-Ebrahimian, "This Beijing-Linked Billionaire Is Funding Policy Research at Washington's Most Influential Institutions," *Foreign Policy*, November 28, 2017, accessed October 19, 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2017/11/28/this-beijing-linked-billionaire-is-funding-policy-research-at-washingtons-most-influential-institutions-china-dc/>.

32 Allen-Ebrahimian, "This Beijing-Linked Billionaire"; Casey Michel, "Money Talks: Len Blavatnik and The Council On Foreign Relations," *Bellingcat*, October 10, 2019, accessed October 19, 2020, <https://www.bellingcat.com/news/2019/10/10/money-talks-len-blavatnik-and-the-council-on-foreign-relations/>.



Atlantic Council. This includes a donation of between \$250,000 and \$999,999 that the Turkish Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources made to the US think tank in 2015.<sup>33</sup> Private companies in non-democracies also pump considerable sums into research spaces in liberal democracies. The Kremlin has repeatedly attempted to channel money into prestigious Western think tanks, for example via the Russian state company Gazprom (although there have recently been fewer willing takers in liberal democracies). In one particular case, a businessman with close ties to the Kremlin even set up a new think tank in Berlin called the Dialogue of Civilizations Research Institute (DOC). A number of well-respected academics (such as Claus Offe, Richard Higgott and Philippe Schmitter) have appeared at events of the new institute. Moreover, respected institutions (including the London School of Economics and Carleton University) have become partners of this venture. DOC was even able to convince independent academic peer reviewers appointed by the Volkswagen Foundation to fund a DOC conference in Dushanbe on the topic “Turning Brain Drain into Brain Circulation”. Most likely, these peer reviewers did not take a closer look at who and what is behind the organization. For DOC it was not the modest funding received from the Volkswagen Foundation that was important – the institute could have easily funded the conference out of its own core resources. Rather, it was the co-branding with the Volkswagen Foundation that DOC was after. The institute has proudly used this funding by one of Germany’s leading foundations in its own public relations efforts, seeking to demonstrate its independence.



### Confucius Institutes: A Cautionary Tale

Confucius Institutes (CIs) are educational organizations that teach the Chinese language and culture outside of the People’s Republic. They are funded by Hanban, a Chinese government agency under the control of the Ministry of Education.<sup>34</sup> CIs are jointly set up by a foreign host university and an affiliated Chinese university.<sup>35</sup> In recent years, politicians, intelligence communities and higher education representatives in liberal democracies have become increasingly worried about the risks involved in cooperating with CIs. One of the main sources of concern are the confidential agreements between Hanban and host universities in liberal democracies.<sup>36</sup> In September 2019, contracts between several Australian

33 David L. Phillips, “Draining the Swamp of Turkish Money and Influence,” *Huffington Post*, September 6, 2017, accessed October 19, 2020, [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/draining-the-swamp-of-turkish-influence\\_b\\_59bfl7dbe4b0390a1564def5/](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/draining-the-swamp-of-turkish-influence_b_59bfl7dbe4b0390a1564def5/); Amberin Zaman, “DC think tank accused of bending over backwards for Erdogan,” *Al-Monitor*, May 16, 2017, accessed October 19, 2020, <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2017/05/erdogan-washington-visit-think-tanks.html/>.

34 Larry Diamond and Orville Schell, “Chinese Influence & American Interests - Promoting Constructive Vigilance,” Hoover Institution, 2018, accessed October 19, 2020, [https://www.hoover.org/sites/default/files/research/docs/chineseinfluence\\_americaninterests\\_fullreport\\_web.pdf](https://www.hoover.org/sites/default/files/research/docs/chineseinfluence_americaninterests_fullreport_web.pdf), p. 41, 73.

35 Rachelle Peterson, “Outsourced to China – Confucius Institutes and Soft Power in American Higher Education,” National Association of Scholars, 2017, accessed October 19, 2020, [https://www.nas.org/storage/app/media/Reports/Outsourced%20to%20China/NAS\\_confuciusInstitutes.pdf](https://www.nas.org/storage/app/media/Reports/Outsourced%20to%20China/NAS_confuciusInstitutes.pdf), p. 27.

36 Marshall Sahlins, “China U,” *The Nation*, October 30, 2013, accessed October 19, 2020, <https://www.thenation.com/article/china-u/>; Peterson, “Outsourced to China”, p. 18.

universities and Hanban were leaked for the first time.<sup>37</sup> The leaked documents differ in the extent to which they allow Hanban a say in academic course contents, but all contracts included a non-disclosure clause. Similarly, the Foreign Affairs Committee of the UK House of Commons has speculated that CI contracts with UK universities include clauses which dictate adherence to Chinese laws, including speech codes.<sup>38</sup> The German Free University in Berlin (FUB) signed an agreement that allows Hanban to alter the cooperation agreement based on whether Chinese laws were violated. The FUB also received up to €500,000 for a professorship.<sup>39</sup> Critics of CIs have also accused them of using their curricula to promote the CCP's viewpoints on contentious topics – or of ignoring them altogether. Hanban funds can incentivize universities to further cut their funding for independent Sinology and language professors, thereby increasing the relative influence of Chinese funding. Göttingen University has a so-called Confucius Academic Institute that, unlike mere CIs, explicitly works on fostering academic China studies in cooperation with the University of Nanjing and the Beijing Foreign Studies University and proudly displays the Hanban logo on its website. The former head of the center, Andreas Guder, left his post to take up a Hanban-endowed professorship at the FUB.<sup>40</sup> The CCP also often directly influences events organized and materials provided by the CIs.<sup>41</sup> During the 2014 European Association for Chinese Studies conference in Portugal, “Hanban chief executive Xu Lin confiscated all printed programs and tore out several pages (...) The Confucius China Studies Program, a division of the Confucius Institute Headquarters, was a sponsor of the project and objected to an advertisement for the Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation for International Scholarly Exchange, a Taiwanese co-sponsor of the conference.”<sup>42</sup> Following the reform process initiated by the CCP in January 2018, education of future CI staff now includes more intense ideological preparation to adequately foster a socialist culture.<sup>43</sup> In July 2020, Hanban changed its official name to “Ministry of Education Centre for

- 
- 37 Fergus Hunter, “Universities must accept China’s directives on Confucius Institutes, contracts reveal,” *The Age*, July 25, 2019, accessed October 19, 2020, <https://www.theage.com.au/politics/federal/universities-must-accept-china-s-directives-on-confucius-institutes-contracts-reveal-20190724-p52ab9.html/>.
- 38 Peterson, “Outsourced to China”, p. 17; House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, “A cautious embrace: defending democracy in an age of autocracies,” Second Report of Session 2019, HC 109, November 5, 2019, accessed October 19, 2020, <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201920/cmselect/cmaff/109/109.pdf/>, p. 42f.
- 39 Hinnerk Feldwisch-Drentrup, “Wie sich die FU an chinesische Gesetze bindet,” *Der Tagesspiegel*, January 29, 2020, accessed October 19, 2020, <https://www.tagesspiegel.de/wissen/umstrittene-finanzierung-einer-china-professur-wie-sich-die-fu-an-chinesische-gesetze-bindet/25484672.html/>.
- 40 Christiane Böhm, “Akademisches Konfuzius-Institut an der Universität Göttingen eröffnet,” *Göttinger Tageblatt*, July 2, 2014, accessed October 19, 2020, <https://www.goettinger-tageblatt.de/Campus/Goettingen/Akademisches-Konfuzius-Institut-an-der-Universitaet-Goettingen-eroeffnet/>; Angela Brünjes, “Kritik an China-Kooperation der Universität Göttingen,” *Göttinger Tageblatt*, July 30, 2020, accessed October 19, 2020, <https://www.goettinger-tageblatt.de/Campus/Goettingen/Universitaet-Goettingen-Kritik-an-China-Kooperation/>.
- 41 Bundesregierung, “Aktivitäten chinesischer Konfuzius-Institute an deutschen Hochschulen (Drucksachen 19/15009),” November 27, 2019, accessed October 19, 2020, <https://kleineanfragen.de/bundestag/19/15560-aktivitaeten-chinesischer-konfuzius-institute-an-deutschen-hochschulen/>, p. 5.
- 42 Peterson, “Outsourced to China,” p. 81.
- 43 U.S. House of Representatives, “U.S. Responses to China’s Foreign Influence,” Serial No. 115-118, March 21, 2018, accessed October 19, 2020, <https://docs.house.gov/meetings/FA/FA05/20180321/108056/HHRG-115-FA05-Transcript-20180321.pdf>, p. 15.

Language Education and Cooperation”.<sup>44</sup> Many universities have now begun to question their cooperation contracts with CIs. In the United States, more than two dozen universities have discontinued their respective cooperation with CIs since 2014. In many of these cases, it was university staff or teacher-led associations that petitioned for the contracts to be terminated, arguing that the goals and values of their host institutions were incompatible with those propagated by the CIs.<sup>45</sup> In Europe, the Free University in Brussels (VUB) in late 2019 decided not to extend the contract with its CI beyond June 2020 on the grounds that a continued cooperation would not be “in line with its [the VUB’s] principles of free research.”<sup>46</sup> A number of other European universities have since followed the Belgian example and discontinued their contracts with Hanban. The Australian attorney-general’s department even considered requiring CIs to be registered as a form of “foreign influence” under Australia’s new foreign influence transparency scheme.<sup>47</sup>

It is important to note that the CI concept is not an exclusively Chinese phenomenon. The Russian leadership has been following a similar approach with the Russkiy Mir Centers and the corresponding Russkiy Mir Foundation (RMF), a government-organized non-governmental organization (GONGO). The Princess Dashkova Russian Centre at the University of Edinburgh, for instance, receives nearly all its funds from the RMF.<sup>48</sup> The center officially aims to serve as a hub of expertise on Russian studies and advanced research on Russian culture and language for Scottish, UK and EU bodies.<sup>49</sup> However, some have alleged that the actual purpose is to build links with universities to support the Kremlin’s intelligence gathering efforts.<sup>50</sup>

44 Zhuang Pinghui, “China’s Confucius Institutes rebrand after overseas propaganda rows,” *South China Morning Post*, July 4, 2020, accessed October 19, 2020, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3091837/chinas-confucius-institutes-rebrand-after-overseas-propaganda/>.

45 Peterson, “Outsourced to China,” p. 148; Diamond and Schell, “Chinese Influence & American Interests,” p. 42; Human Rights Watch, “China: Government Threats to Academic Freedom Abroad,” 2019, accessed October 19, 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/03/21/china-government-threats-academic-freedom-abroad/>.

46 Sicco Wittermans, “The VUB will not continue its cooperation with the Confucius Institute,” *VUB Press*, December 10, 2019, accessed October 19, 2020, <https://press.vub.ac.be/the-vub-will-not-continue-its-cooperation-with-the-confucius-institute/#/>.

47 Paul Karp, “Government to assess regulation of Chinese influence at universities,” *The Guardian*, July 25, 2019, accessed October 19, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2019/jul/25/government-to-assess-regulation-of-chinese-influence-at-universities/>.

48 Paul Hutcheson, “Edinburgh University centre received over 90% of its funding from Putin ‘culture’ body,” *The Herald*, April 22, 2018, accessed October 19, 2020, <https://www.heraldsotland.com/news/16175709.edinburgh-university-centre-received-over-90-of-its-funding-from-putin-culture-body/>.

49 Dashkova Centre, “About Us,” 2018, accessed October 19, 2020, <https://www.ed.ac.uk/literatures-languages-cultures/dashkova/about/>.

50 European Parliament, *European Parliament resolution of 23 November 2016 on EU strategic communication to counteract propaganda against it by third parties*, P8\_TA(2016)0441, November 23, 2016, accessed October 19, 2020, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-8-2016-0441\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-8-2016-0441_EN.html); Kateryna Smaglyi, “Hybrid Analytica: Pro-Kremlin Expert Propaganda in Moscow, Europe and the U.S.,” Underminers and Institute of Modern Russia, October 2018, accessed October 19, 2020, [https://static1.squarespace.com/static/59f8f41e-fl4aa13b95239af0/t/5c6d8b38b208fc7087fd2b2a/1550682943143/Smaglyi\\_Hybrid-Analytica\\_10-2018-upd.pdf](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/59f8f41e-fl4aa13b95239af0/t/5c6d8b38b208fc7087fd2b2a/1550682943143/Smaglyi_Hybrid-Analytica_10-2018-upd.pdf), pp. 22-24; Vladislava Vojtišková et al., “The Bear in Sheep’s Clothing: Russia’s Government-Funded Organisations in the EU,” Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies, 2016, accessed October 19, 2020, <https://www.martenscentre.eu/publications/bear-sheeps-clothing-russias-government-funded-organisations-eu/>, p. 42.

As a recent Freedom House study on the United Kingdom documents: “The UK’s leading universities have accepted sponsorship from authoritarian regimes accused of human rights violations and links to terrorism, with hundreds of millions of pounds funneled into British higher-education institutions to establish research centers and other kinds of partnerships. Such actions, which may first occur as benign, might have an outward-facing political agenda to gain international respectability. More importantly, they represent new mechanisms for authoritarian regimes to influence the structures of research and be recognized, informally and internationally, as legitimate.”<sup>51</sup>

This trend is not limited to the UK. Another feature of the internationalization of the higher education sector that comes with potentially harmful side effects concerns tuition. International students from non-democracies are an asset for many universities in democracies. At the same time, this can also create risks of dependence. These risks differ based on the degree of public funding that is available for universities. In Germany, for example, China is the number one country of origin for international students (42,676 out of all 394,665 students in the 2018/2019 semester came from China), closely followed by Turkey (39,634 students). Russia ranked on fifth place with 13,968 students.<sup>52</sup> Chinese students are also the biggest foreign student group in the EU, making up a share of 11.2 percent (or 1.71 million students) in 2017.<sup>53</sup> The same holds true for Australia, where Chinese students accounted for 38.3 percent (or 152,591 students) of all students in 2018.<sup>54</sup> This creates more severe risks wherever universities depend on tuition fees. In most European countries, including Germany, the government covers the bulk of the costs incurred by universities. While universities can still have a financial incentive to attract students to get higher levels of public funding, this makes the need for attracting foreign students much less acute in financial terms.<sup>55</sup> In tuition-based systems, however, reliance on foreign tuition fees is a serious issue. Australia is an extreme case in this regard: in the year 2017, Chinese students’ tuition made up between 13 and 23 percent of the total revenue of seven key Australian universities with high exposure to the Chinese market.<sup>56</sup> The fact that travel bans instated due to the recent COVID-19 outbreak led to serious financial concerns for Australian and US universities demonstrates the extent to which these institutions are financially dependent on Chinese students, who were now suddenly banned from

- 
- 51 Saipira Furstenberg, Tena Prelec and John Heathershaw, “The Internationalization of Universities and the Repression of Academic Freedom,” Freedom House, July 2020, accessed October 20, 2020, <https://freedom-house.org/report/special-report/2020/internationalization-universities-and-repression-academic-freedom>.
  - 52 Statistisches Bundesamt, “Studierende an Hochschulen - Wintersemester 2018/2019,” 2019, accessed October 19, 2020, [https://www.destatis.de/DE/Themen/Gesellschaft-Umwelt/Bildung-Forschung-Kultur/Hochschulen/Publikationen/Downloads-Hochschulen/studierende-hochschulen-endg-2110410197004.pdf?\\_\\_blob=publicationFile/](https://www.destatis.de/DE/Themen/Gesellschaft-Umwelt/Bildung-Forschung-Kultur/Hochschulen/Publikationen/Downloads-Hochschulen/studierende-hochschulen-endg-2110410197004.pdf?__blob=publicationFile/), p. 51.
  - 53 Eurostat, “Learning mobility statistics,” 2019, accessed October 19, 2020, [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Learning\\_mobility\\_statistics#Number\\_and\\_share\\_of\\_students\\_from\\_abroad/](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Learning_mobility_statistics#Number_and_share_of_students_from_abroad/).
  - 54 Hazel Ferguson and Henry Sherrel, “Overseas students in Australian higher education: a quick guide,” Parliamentary Library, 2019, accessed October 19, 2020 [https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/library/prspub/6765126/upload\\_binary/6765126.pdf/](https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/library/prspub/6765126/upload_binary/6765126.pdf/), p. 3.
  - 55 David Matthews, “China a ‘challenging’ partner, says German exchange scheme head,” *Times Higher Education*, January 29, 2020, accessed October 19, 2020, <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/china-challenging-partner-says-german-exchange-scheme-head/>.
  - 56 Salvatore Babones, “The China Student Boom and the Risks It Poses to Australian Universities,” The Centre for Independent Studies, 2019, accessed October 19, 2020, <https://www.cis.org.au/app/uploads/2019/08/ap5.pdf/>, p. 1.

entering the respective countries.<sup>57</sup> Consequently, it is not surprising how worried these universities are about not ‘losing out on’ Chinese students, so much so that they become increasingly concerned with not irritating official China.<sup>58</sup> This also concerns Ireland: University College Dublin, for example, went so far as to try to change its own guidelines on academic freedom to allow for “different interpretations” of academic freedom, so as to make the university more suitable for a Chinese audience, citing the “strategic imperative to internationalize higher education.” In the end, the university authorities had to retreat from their position due to the significant backlash.<sup>59</sup>

In addition to this dependence on funds or tuition fees from China, joint campuses between universities in democracies and non-democracies or international branch campuses could lead to non-monetary forms of dependence. The Cross-Border Education Research Team (C-BERT) defines an “international branch campus” as an entity that is owned and operated at least in part by a foreign higher education provider and offers an entire academic program on the campus, leading to a recognized degree by the foreign institution. The US, UK, France, Russia, and Australia are the biggest exporters of branch campuses, while the biggest importers, meaning hosts, are China and the UAE.<sup>60</sup> In most cases, these partnerships generate revenue, reputation and research opportunities for the exporters, while the designs of the programs mainly reflect the strategic goals of the host country.<sup>61</sup> The state of academic freedom at branch campuses in non-democracies is another big concern. Moreover, joint activities (including research centers) between free universities and universities in China increasingly fall prey to stronger state control. Take, for instance, Fudan University, one of the country’s most prestigious higher education institutions and a favorite partner of universities in democracies: in late 2019, Fudan University changed its charter, substituting references to freedom of thought and academic independence with a reference to “serving the governance of the Communist party.”<sup>62</sup>

---

57 Jamie Smyth J. et al., “Coronavirus exposes western universities’ reliance on China,” *Financial Times*, February 19, 2020, accessed October 19, 2020, <https://www.ft.com/content/b3429de6-4dec-11ea-95a0-43d18ec715f5/>.

58 Diamond and Schell, “Chinese Influence & American Interests”, p. 48; Isaac Stone Fish, “The other political correctness,” *The New Republic*, September 4, 2018, accessed October 19, 2020 <https://newrepublic.com/article/150476/american-elite-universities-selfcensorship-china/>; Babones, “The China Student Boom,” p. 12f; Jack Power, “Concern over proposed changes to UCD’s academic freedom,” *Irish Times*, April 9, 2020, accessed October 19, 2020 from <https://www.irishtimes.com/concern-over-proposed-changes-to-ucd-s-academic-freedom-1.4225393?mode=amp/>.

59 Power, “Concern over proposed changes”.

60 Kevin Kinser and Jason E. Lane, “C-BERT Branch Campus Listing,” Cross-Border Education Research Team, 2017, accessed October 19, 2020, <http://cbert.org/resources-data/intl-campus/>.

61 Chris Mackie, “Transnational Education and Globalization: A Look into the Complex Environment of International Branch Campuses,” *World Education News Reviews*, May 28, 2020, accessed October 19, 2020, <https://wenr.wes.org/2019/05/the-complex-environment-of-international-branch-campuses/>; Chris Mackie, “International Branch Campuses Part Two: China and the United Arab Emirates,” *World Education News Reviews*, June 13, 2019, accessed October 19, 2020, <https://wenr.wes.org/2019/06/international-branch-campuses-part-two-china-and-the-united-arab-emirates/>.

62 Philip Wen, “Demand for Absolute Loyalty to Beijing at Chinese Universities Triggers Dissent,” *The Wall Street Journal*, December 18, 2019, accessed October 19, 2020, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/demand-for-absolute-loyalty-to-beijing-at-chinese-universities-triggers-dissent-11576674047>; see also Peterson, “Out-sourced to China,” p. 19; Douglas Belkin and Philipp Wen, “American Colleges Watch for Changes at Chinese Universities,” *The Wall Street Journal*, December 27, 2019, accessed October 19, 2020, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/american-colleges-watch-for-changes-at-chinese-universities-11577474706?mod=searchresults&page=1&pos=1/>.

In general, dependence risks are not necessarily limited to funding. Access to scientific infrastructure and expertise, local partners for dialogue programs, and other non-monetary assets can also create dependencies.<sup>63</sup> Many research institutes resist disengaging from cooperation with partners in non-democracies out of a fear of missing out on opportunities and resources. Especially China's development into one of the global leaders in research has greatly increased such dependencies. In certain fields, Chinese researchers are now the leading innovators, creating strong incentives to intensify cooperation with them. In addition, there are circumstances where research requires specific natural or demographic conditions that are only present in few countries, making replication outside of these contexts almost impossible – which can in turn create dependencies. Moreover, non-democracies often use the very access to their country as leverage to reward “good” or punish “bad” behavior by researchers that depend on visas to carry out their work.

## (Self-)Censorship

Dependence often brings about another key risk: self-censorship. Many non-democracies have strict censorship rules and actively seek to create an environment of fear to pressure individuals to censor themselves. While such censorship mostly targets these countries' own citizens at home and abroad, it can also affect non-citizens who are dependent in one of the forms previously discussed.<sup>64</sup>

Non-democracies use individual students, student organizations or research staff to influence campuses in democracies. In China, CCP chairman Xi Jinping stated that Chinese students studying abroad are a key focus of United Front work.<sup>65</sup> Chinese authorities seek to control Chinese Students and Scholars Associations (CSSA), partly by providing funding to them and making sure they maintain close ties with Chinese embassies. Through CSSAs, Chinese officials at times seek to influence on-campus debates in the CCP's favor or prevent debates and events on issues that are considered too sensitive by the CCP.<sup>66</sup>

To intimidate Chinese exchange students abroad, Chinese authorities often visit the individuals' families at home in the PRC to complain about ‘subversive conduct’, which often only means that the respective students have spoken up against the party line or participated in protests.<sup>67</sup> These tactics add to the overall pressure and surveillance by the Chinese government that Chinese citizens abroad and also diaspora

---

63 Matteo N. Wong, “The End of the Harvard Century,” *The Harvard Crimson*, April 23, 2020, accessed October 19, 2020, <https://www.thecrimson.com/article/2020/4/23/harvard-china-scrutiny/>; Kate O’Keeffe and Aruna Viswanatha, “Chinese Military Turns to U.S. University to Conduct Covert Research,” *The Wall Street Journal*, February 23, 2020, accessed October 19, 2020, [https://www.wsj.com/articles/chinese-military-turns-to-u-s-university-to-conduct-covert-research-11582466400?mod=trending\\_now\\_pos4/](https://www.wsj.com/articles/chinese-military-turns-to-u-s-university-to-conduct-covert-research-11582466400?mod=trending_now_pos4/).

64 Matthews, “China a ‘challenging’ partner”.

65 Hamilton and Ohlberg, *Hidden Hand*, p.232.

66 Wong, “The End of the Harvard Century”; Yojana Sharma, “Spanish university caught in China-Taiwan cross-fire,” *University World News*, August 30, 2018, accessed October 19, 2020 <https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20180830173445642/>.

67 Diamond and Schell, “Chinese Influence & American Interests,” p. 44.



Chinese have to endure, the latter often despite no longer having a Chinese passport.<sup>68</sup> Compared to their peers, these individuals are particularly vulnerable to threats as they often have friends and family back in the PRC.

Such pressure from non-democracies often leaves the affected individuals no choice but to self-censor. A few instances of outright threats or clashes with the authorities are usually enough to induce the kind of caution that devolves into self-censorship.<sup>69</sup> Some non-Chinese China scholars have stated that they might subconsciously censor themselves.<sup>70</sup> In a study from 2019, a large majority of China scholars agree with the statement that “self-censorship is a problem in the China field.”<sup>71</sup> Many China scholars do not want to risk being denied access to sources and individuals in China. They feel under pressure as the Chinese authorities have demonstrated that they will decline visa applications by scholars who are deemed too critical.<sup>72</sup> Similar self-censoring practices also increased in Turkey after the coup of July 15/16, 2016. Limited free speech and government and societal sensitivities had already warranted caution by scholars when dealing with certain topics; but the coup and the unprecedented wave of imprisonments of civil society actors, scholars, journalists, and civil servants that followed took self-censorship in Turkey to a new level.<sup>73</sup> Under these circumstances, scholars and civil society actors in the country have become much more skilled in framing issues in a way that does not incite unwanted attention from the Turkish authorities.

Among dialogue program coordinators and participants, too, it is not unusual to self-censor in order to appeal to or at least to not offend foreign guests and functionaries from non-democracies. Participants in dialogue formats often consider self-censoring practices as forms of respect or consideration for their partners. In practice, however, these exchanges easily become superficial and resemble official diplomatic communication more than actual meaningful dialogue. In the worst case, dialogue practitioners might adapt to such an extent that they reproduce the official narratives of their counterparts from non-democracies. If no one dares to speak their mind, the effectiveness of dialogue programs should be questioned – as should the resources that are being spent on them. However, unlike in the sphere of academia, clearly and openly documented accounts of self-censorship and how to handle contentious issues in dialogue programs are rare. This makes it difficult to comprehensively assess and evaluate the prevalence of self-censorship in dialogue programs.

## Instrumentalization

Non-democracies often seek to use networks created through cooperation between universities, foundations, think tanks, or CSOs to popularize and legitimize their

---

68 U.S. House of Representatives, “U.S. Responses,” p. 15.

69 Sheena Chestnut Greitens and Rory Truex, “Repressive Experiences among China Scholars: New Evidence from Survey Data,” *The China Quarterly* 242, (2019): pp. 1-27, accessed October 19, 2020, <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/china-quarterly/article/repressive-experiences-among-china-scholars-new-evidence-from-survey-data/C1CB08324457ED90199C274CDC153127>, p. 370.

70 Diamond and Schell, “Chinese Influence & American Interests,” p. 72.

71 Greitens and Truex, “Repressive Experiences,” p. 366.

72 Diamond and Schell, “Chinese Influence & American Interests,” p. 68.

73 Human Rights Watch, “Turkey: Government Targeting Academics,” May 14, 2018, accessed October 19, 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/05/14/turkey-government-targeting-academics>.

narratives and actions in liberal democracies. This starts with universities where non-democratic governments hope to shape the worldviews of future decision-making elites. The Russian government, for example, uses university exchange programs as a form of ‘educational diplomacy’. Russia’s cooperation activities in higher education – from student exchanges to joint or branch campuses – aim to foster uncritical or even favorable attitudes toward Russia and its government’s policy goals among foreign students.<sup>74</sup> Beyond the higher education space, pro-Kremlin elites have used organizations<sup>75</sup> such as the Berlin-based Dialogue of Civilizations Research Institute to approach political and academic elites in Europe and North America.<sup>76</sup> One way is by capitalizing on the attendance of reputable scholars and high-level individuals from liberal democracies at DOC-sponsored dialogue formats, thereby legitimizing DOC as a “normal” institution, despite its close ties to the Kremlin.<sup>77</sup>

Cooperation projects allow non-democracies to decouple their public image from human rights abuses or geopolitical aggressions when engaging with their partners or in front of international audiences. During the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the CCP has been using aid provisions to new epicenters in the EU as well as research cooperation with health scientists in liberal democracies to present China as a global benefactor and research pioneer.<sup>78</sup> Through measures like these, the CCP has been able to shift attention away from its initial handling of the outbreak, and especially from how its propaganda and the targeting of whistleblowers at the beginning of the pandemic were among the main factors that allowed the virus to spread globally.<sup>79</sup> Talking about cooperation programs with stakeholders from non-democracies without mentioning rampant human rights abuses creates the illusion that cooperation can happen outside of the context of authoritarian repression.

Actors in research cooperation need to speak up on human rights violations. It is good that academic associations such as the German Rectors’ Conference (HRK) have chosen to comment on and criticize assaults on academic freedom in partner countries like Hungary and Turkey. In 2016, when the wave of detentions of critical scholars and journalists in Turkey began, then-HRK President Horst Hippler condemned the Turkish government’s conduct, expressed his organization’s solidarity with the detained peers and demanded that Turkey adhere to liberal democratic values.<sup>80</sup> For a long time, this straightforwardness was missing when it came to China. Heiner Roetz, a German

74 Sirke Mäkinen, “In Search of the Status of an Educational Great Power? Analysis of Russia’s Educational Diplomacy Discourse,” *Problems of Post-Communism* 63, no. 3 (2016): pp.183-196, accessed October 19, 2020, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10758216.2016.1172489>, p. 193.

75 Alina Polyakova, Marlene Laruelle, Stefan Meister and Neil Barnett, “The Kremlin’s Trojan Horses,” Atlantic Council, November 15, 2016, accessed October 19, 2020, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/report/kremlin-trojan-horses/>, p. 13f; Smagliy, “Hybrid Analytica,” p. 31.

76 Smagliy, *Hybrid Analytica*, p. 6f; Markus Wehner, “Achtung, Wladimir kommt!,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, June 28, 2016, accessed October 19, 2020, <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/putin-vertrauter-jakun-in-gruendet-politik-institut-in-berlin-14308332.html>.

77 Smagliy, *Hybrid Analytica*, p.7.

78 Cheng, “As U.S., China Clash Over Coronavirus”; Javier Hernández, “Leading Western Publisher Bows to Chinese Censorship,” *The New York Times*, November 1, 2019, accessed October 19, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/01/world/asia/china-springer-nature-censorship.html>.

79 Hernández, “Leading Western Publisher”.

80 Horst Hippler, “Open letter – Re: Sweeping actions against higher education professionals in Turkey,” Hochschulrektorenkonferenz, December 7, 2017, accessed October 19, 2020, [https://www.hrk.de/fileadmin/redaktion/hrk/02-Dokumente/02-07-Internationales/171207\\_HRK\\_President\\_open\\_letter\\_Turkey.pdf/](https://www.hrk.de/fileadmin/redaktion/hrk/02-Dokumente/02-07-Internationales/171207_HRK_President_open_letter_Turkey.pdf/).



professor emeritus for the History and Philosophy of China at Ruhr University Bochum, has criticized most big German science academies for being conspicuously silent on matters involving China, for example when scientific publisher Springer Nature (with which German academies cooperate closely) agreed to Chinese censorship provisions in 2017.<sup>81</sup> By September 2020, the HRK leadership had published its own guidelines for tackling risks of research cooperation with China, finally answering to critics such as Roetz.<sup>82</sup> More than being complicit, some critics have even accused think tanks and universities in liberal democracies of actively curbing freedom of speech and shutting out critical voices to adhere to demands from non-democracies. The Atlantic Council, for example, excluded speakers that the Turkish government perceived as problematic from its events, a move that was potentially linked to donations it has received from businesses close to the government.<sup>83</sup> Incidents of universities denying dissidents a platform to inform about human rights abuses in their non-democratic home countries – as was the case with Chinese human rights lawyer Teng Biao at Harvard University – also raise concerns.<sup>84</sup> An extreme case is the German-Russian Forum (GRF), which is an organization that was originally founded to support the development of Russian civil society but effectively became a public relations firm for authoritarian elites.<sup>85</sup> This development eventually led the GRF’s founder Alexandra Countess Lambsdorff to disengage from the organization.<sup>86</sup>

The perception that a growing number of think tanks and universities are being compromised in this way is enhanced by the assertiveness with which non-democracies shape the agenda of joint research and dialogue programs. Agendas of cooperation arrangements are often heavily influenced by the interests of non-democracies, mirroring what they deem worthy of attention. In the case of China, this assertiveness in agenda shaping is highly systematic. Chinese incentive structures push Chinese scholars to take initiative and actively shape the agenda of their cooperation activities. Their partners in liberal democracies often let them do it, thus allowing them to dictate the narrative of the joint project.<sup>87</sup> At joint research conferences, the Chinese side also often tries to control the agenda, participants’ lists and what is written.<sup>88</sup> At the same time, partners from non-democracies who are close to the respective regimes usually make sure to exclude organizations from their home country that represent opposition or dissident voices. Critical organizations experience systematic exclusion from certain cooperation programs as their regime-friendly counterparts work to deny them access to potential partner institutions in liberal democracies.<sup>89</sup>

---

81 Heiner Roetz, “Viel Verständnis für Zensoren,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, July 8, 2020, <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/karriere-hochschule/springer-und-china-das-geschaefit-mit-zensoren-wird-geduldet-16849367.html>.

82 Hochschulrektorenkonferenz, “China,” accessed October 19, 2020, <https://www.hrk.de/themen/internationalen/internationale-zusammenarbeit/asien/china/>.

83 Zaman, “DC Think Tank Accused of Bending Over Backwards”.

84 Wong, “The End of the Harvard Century”.

85 Polyakova et al., “The Kremlin’s Trojan Horses,” p. 13f; Ebba Hagenberg-Miliu, “Mittlerin zwischen Wirtschaft und Politik,” *General-Anzeiger*, January 22, 2017, accessed October 19, 2020, [https://www.general-anzeiger-bonn.de/bonn/stadt-bonn/mittlerin-zwischen-wirtschaft-und-politik\\_aid-43205223/](https://www.general-anzeiger-bonn.de/bonn/stadt-bonn/mittlerin-zwischen-wirtschaft-und-politik_aid-43205223/).

86 Hagenberg-Miliu, “Mittlerin zwischen Wirtschaft und Politik”.

87 D’Hooghe et al., “Assessing Europe-China Collaboration,” p. 20.

88 Diamond and Schell, “Chinese Influence & American Interests,” p. 49.

89 Ibid, p. 64f.

## Repression

Cooperation partners from non-democracies often find themselves under severe scrutiny and pressure by their non-democratic governments. This is especially the case when they work and cooperate on controversial issues. While repressive action can target locals and foreigners alike, locals are often in a more precarious situation.

Cooperation on designated ‘taboo’ subjects will often trigger repressive action by non-democratic governments, especially when cooperation takes place in non-democracies.<sup>90</sup> In China, the key taboo topics are the infamous “three Ts”: 1) the Tiananmen Square massacre of 1989 and the respective status of 2) Taiwan and 3) Tibet.<sup>91</sup> The banned religious movement Falun Gong is another touchy subject for the CCP. And recently, the CCP’s repressive policies in the Chinese province of Xinjiang and vis-à-vis the Uyghurs, the persecuted Muslim minority group in Xinjiang, have also become problematic as issues of work. International and local scholars working on such issues often are not allowed to travel to certain parts of the country for their fieldwork. In fact, scholars facing problems during the visa application process, which often result in their requests being denied, were disproportionately those who worked on topics like ethnicity, human rights, religion, and the CCP.<sup>92</sup> In Turkey, the topics that are most risky to pursue for scholars and other civil society actors are those around the rights of minorities, particularly related to the Kurdish minority, as well as the genocide against the Armenians in the early 20th century and critical assessments of the founder of the modern Turkish state, Kemal Atatürk.<sup>93</sup> Legislation on freedom of expression and libel laws and the arbitrary implementation of such laws facilitate repression and persecution.<sup>94</sup> The infamous Article 301 of the Turkish penal code criminalizes “insults” to the “Turkish nation,” enabling judicial action against anyone who deals with the previously mentioned issues in a critical manner.<sup>95</sup> Altuğ Taner Akçam, a renowned scholar on the Armenian genocide, was one of the many scholars persecuted under this article due to his work on and critique of the arbitrary-yet-frequent application of the law.<sup>96</sup> The case of Peter Steudtner, a German human rights activist who had travelled to Turkey for a workshop, shows that non-Turkish citizens cannot expect to be spared either. The Turkish authorities put him on pre-trial detention for four months on the basis of terrorism charges before he was let go and had to leave the country.<sup>97</sup>

---

90 Fabian Schmidt, “Deutsch-türkische Wissenschaftskooperation in Gefahr,” *Deutsche Welle*, July 24, 2016, accessed October 19, 2019, <https://www.dw.com/de/deutsch-t%C3%BCrkische-wissenschaftskooperation-in-gefahr/a-19421457/>; International Center for Not-for-Profit Law, “Civic Freedom Monitor: Turkey,” 2020, accessed October 19, 2020, <https://www.icnl.org/resources/civic-freedom-monitor/turkey/>.

91 Wong, “The End of the Harvard Century”; Diamond and Schell, “Chinese Influence & American Interests,” p. 73; Hughes, “Confucius Institutes and the university,” p. 64.

92 D’Hooghe et al. “Assessing Europe-China Collaboration,” p. 31.

93 Human Rights Watch, “Turkey: Government Targeting Academics”.

94 International Center for Not-for-Profit Law, “Civic Freedom Monitor: Turkey”.

95 Human Rights Watch, “Turkey: Government Amendments Will Not Protect Free Speech,” 2008, accessed October 19, 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2008/04/16/turkey-government-amendments-will-not-protect-free-speech/>.

96 Columbia Global Freedom of Expression, “Akçam v. Turkey,” accessed March 6, 2020, <https://globalfreedomofexpression.columbia.edu/cases/akcam-v-turkey/>.

97 “Steudtner von Terrorvorwürfen freigesprochen,” *Tagesschau*, July 3, 2020, accessed October 19, 2020, <https://www.tagesschau.de/ausland/steudtner-urteil-freispruch-101.html/>.

In Russia, CSOs working on human rights, corruption, feminist, LGBTQI\* or environmental issues are under particular pressure by the government.<sup>98</sup> There is an increasing danger that organizations from democracies that cooperate with these organizations can increase the repression they and their employees face. For their activities on the ground, dialogue organizations that maintain offices in non-democracies also face ever shrinking room to maneuver. The German pro-democracy organization Friedrich Naumann Foundation, for example, decided to close its office in Hong Kong after Beijing forced a new security law on Hong Kong in 2020. The foundation stated: “Those who work for democracy and freedom in Hong Kong today are putting themselves in danger. We cannot and will not expose our employees and partners to this risk. Our employees can be accused of being ‘foreign agents’ and sentenced to several years’ imprisonment on the pretext that they are ‘foreign agents’ – without due process of law, without a chance for a fair trial.”<sup>99</sup>

Similarly, restrictive registration and financing criteria enable repression and often directly target organizations that cooperate internationally. In Turkey, CSOs have to register all their members with the information system of the Ministry of the Interior. These registration requirements are particularly concerning in light of the countries’ recent history of crackdowns against CSOs, activists, journalists, and generally anyone who openly dissents from official government narratives and policy.<sup>100</sup> In China, following the 2017 “Law on the Management of Foreign NGOs” all CSOs now have to register with the Ministry of Public Security. The law also requires that CSOs need to find government sponsors and submit annual financing reports. The Chinese authorities consider foreign funding and foreign CSOs as suspicious.<sup>101</sup> A similar suspicion toward foreign funds and organizations prevails in Russia, where a “foreign agent” law categorizes a CSO as a “foreign agent” if it fulfills two conditions: first, the CSO receives foreign funding, including donations from individuals; second, it engages in political activity at the same time. The law’s definition of political activity is extremely broad and hence allows for arbitrary categorizations.<sup>102</sup> Once listed as a foreign agent, a CSO has to provide much more documentation. The resulting bureaucratic hassle usually not only eats up significant parts of an organization’s resources; the fact that these organizations need to mark every single output with the label “foreign agent” also makes it likely that they unintentionally break these rules, which means risking huge fines that would bankrupt them. This is why a number of CSOs chose to close and re-open as organizations without foreign funding.<sup>103</sup> The CSOs, including think tanks, that

98 Vojtěšková et al., “The Bear in Sheep’s Clothing,” p. 20; Yulia Skokova, “Russia: More funding but less stability,” in *2018 Report on the State of Civil Society in the EU and Russia*, Berlin: EU-Russia Civil Society Forum, 2018, accessed October 19, 2020, [https://eu-russia-csf.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/190327\\_RU-EU-Report2018\\_allpages.pdf](https://eu-russia-csf.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/190327_RU-EU-Report2018_allpages.pdf), pp.100-102.

99 Friedrich Naumann Stiftung, “Hong Kong: Naumann Foundation closes office,” September 18, 2020, accessed October 19, 2020, <https://www.freiheit.org/press-release-hong-kong-naumann-foundation-closes-office/>.

100 International Center for Not-for-Profit Law, “Civic Freedom Monitor: Turkey”.

101 Zepheng Huang, “NGOs are under threat in China’s latest crackdown against ‘foreign forces,’” *Quartz*, January 5, 2017, accessed October 19, 2020, <https://qz.com/873489/ngos-are-trying-to-stay-alive-in-chinas-latest-crackdown-against-foreign-forces/>.

102 Civil Rights Defenders, “Never Give Up – Russian Human Rights Defenders Keep Swimming Under the Ice,” March 12, 2018, accessed October 19, 2020, <https://crd.org/2018/03/12/never-give-up-russian-human-rights-defenders-keep-swimming-under-the-ice/>, p. 7; Skokova, “Russia: More funding but less stability,” p. 100f.

103 Civil Rights Defenders, “Never Give Up,” p. 7; Skokova, “Russia: More funding but less stability,” p. 99.

are most affected by this law are also the more independent ones. Many of them were established in the 1990s and early 2000s during a phase of greater political openness in Russia. As the Russian government did not have sufficient funds to finance these organizations, most of them had to rely on foreign funders and thus actively sought out international cooperation opportunities. This lack of government funding ensured a certain degree of independence when the country's political system turned more authoritarian.<sup>104</sup> Current Russian legislation explicitly targets these organizations as new registration and financial reporting criteria leave only little room for dissent.

In addition to repressive measures aimed at domestic organizations, non-democratic governments promote hostile narratives about anything remotely foreign. The CCP, for instance, uses provisions under the NGO Law to punish and harass foreign CSOs.<sup>105</sup> Under the foreign agents law, Russian authorities put international CSOs that the prosecutor's office perceives as "threatening the country's constitutional order" on a list of "undesired organizations." Once on this list, these CSOs cannot operate in Russia anymore. The law also forbids local CSOs to accept funding from or have contact or share materials with undesired organizations.<sup>106</sup> As of April 30, 2019, the registry of undesired organizations included 15 foreign organizations, among them the German Marshall Fund of the United States (on the list since March 2018) and the Open Society Foundations (on the list since December 2015).<sup>107</sup> Apart from increasing CSOs' dependence on government funding, the Kremlin also uses the terminology of the law to blackmail critical organizations. Politicians often use "foreign agent" as a slur to discredit critical organizations – even if they do not legally hold this status.<sup>108</sup> The term also suggests that the organizations in question are spies or traitors. Similar sentiments prevail in Turkey, where politicians often accuse Turkish and foreign CSOs of conspiring against the state and the Turkish people. For instance, activist and head of the Anadolu Kültür Foundation Osman Kavala has repeatedly been accused of being a European "puppet."<sup>109</sup> German foundations that work on Kurdish and other minority rights in Turkey, such as the Heinrich Böll Stiftung, have had to face intimidation and threats as the Turkish authorities have actively fired up nationalist segments against

---

104 Anton Barbashin and Alexander Graef, "Thinking foreign policy in Russia: Think tanks and grand narratives," Atlantic Council, November 12, 2019, accessed October 19, 2020, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/report/thinking-foreign-policy-in-russia-think-tanks-and-grand-narratives/>, p. 7.

105 "Chinese Government Says it Has 'Punished' U.S. NGO under the Foreign NGO Law," *ChinaFile*, November 25, 2019, accessed October 19, 2020, <http://www.chinafile.com/ngo/latest/chinese-government-says-it-has-punished-us-ngo-under-foreign-ngo-law/>.

106 Skokova, "Russia: More funding but less stability," p. 100-102.

107 The International Center for Not-for-Profit Law, "Civic Freedom Monitor: Russia," 2019, accessed October 19, 2020, <http://www.icnl.org/research/monitor/russia.html#intro/>.

108 Charles Digges, "In troubling déjà vu, Russian government says foreign agent nonprofits are getting millions," *Bellona*, May 3, 2017, accessed October 19, 2020, <https://bellona.org/news/russian-human-rights-issues/russian-ngo-law/2017-05-in-troubling-deja-vu-russian-government-says-foreign-agent-nonprofits-are-getting-millions/>; Civil Rights Defenders, "Never Give Up," p. 8; Skokova, "Russia: More funding but less stability," p. 102.

109 Christian Buttke, "Deutsche Stiftungen am Pranger," *Deutschlandfunk*, May 23, 2017, accessed October 19, 2020, [https://www.deutschlandfunk.de/tuerkei-deutsche-stiftungen-am-pranger.795.de.html?dram:article\\_id=386867/](https://www.deutschlandfunk.de/tuerkei-deutsche-stiftungen-am-pranger.795.de.html?dram:article_id=386867/); "Gezi-Proteste: Türkei stellt Haftbefehl für Can Dündar aus," *ZEIT ONLINE*, Dezember 5, 2018, accessed October 19, 2020, <https://www.zeit.de/news/2018-12/05/gezi-proteste-tuerkei-stellt-haftbefehl-fuer-can-duendar-aus-181205-99-104678/>.

them, including by accusing them of collaborating with terrorists.<sup>110</sup> These narratives taint the public perception of individual organizations as well as the CSO sphere and international cooperation at large, often endangering the individuals that work for or with the respective organizations. Foreigners working in cooperation or dialogue programs are at a heightened risk of being targeted if there are diplomatic tensions between their home country and the non-democracy in question. The Turkish-American national Serkan Golge, a former NASA scientist, was detained – as were 20 other American citizens – on terrorism charges and alleged links to the Gülen movement during the Turkish government’s extensive crackdown on civil society in the summer of 2016. This happened amidst strained Turkish-US relations.<sup>111</sup> The arbitrary arrest and detention of Canadian citizens Michael Kovrig, a former diplomat seconded to the NGO and think tank International Crisis Group, and Michael Spavor, a businessman, by the Chinese authorities in December 2018 is another example.<sup>112</sup>

## Involuntary Technology Transfer and Espionage

Involuntary technology transfer and espionage have been a growing concern for advanced market economies with competitive research and development (R&D) sectors. As early as 1999, the classified *Cox Report*, compiled by a special committee of the US House of Representatives, warned that the Chinese government engages in a wide-ranging campaign to obtain US military technology.<sup>113</sup> Apart from its role in the modernization of the Russian military, Kremlin-sponsored espionage was and continues to be a way to modernize and diversify the increasingly struggling Russian economy.<sup>114</sup> In China, this necessity to “catch up and surpass” – or *ganchao*, as formulated by Xi Jinping – is a principle already described by Mao. He believed China’s previous failures to keep up with technological advancements to be the main reason for its debilitating dependence on foreign powers. Under Xi, *ganchao* has become a core ambition of the CCP and inseparable from Chinese research collaborations with foreign partners.<sup>115</sup> In this context, international higher education cooperation is a way for China to enhance the quality of its own higher education system.<sup>116</sup> The CCP

---

110 Buttkereit, “Deutsche Stiftungen am Pranger”.

111 Carlotta Gall, “Turkey Frees American NASA Scientist Imprisoned for 2 Years,” *The New York Times*, May 29, 2019, accessed October 19, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/29/world/middleeast/turkey-serkan-golge-release.html?auth=login-email&login=email/>.

112 Peter Humphrey, “The Cruel Fate of Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor in China,” *The Diplomat*, December 10, 2019, accessed October 19, 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2019/12/the-cruel-fate-of-michael-kovrig-and-michael-spavor-in-china/>.

113 U.S. House of Representatives, “Select Committee – Appendices,” accessed October 19, 2020, <http://archive.is/Ua08j>.

114 David Zweig and Siqin Kang, “America challenges China’s National Talent Programs,” Center for Strategic & International Studies, 2020, accessed October 19, 2020 <https://www.csis.org/analysis/america-challenges-chinas-national-talent-programs>, p. 8.

115 Julian B. Gewirtz, “China’s Long March to Technological Supremacy,” *Foreign Affairs*, August 27, 2019, accessed October 19, 2020, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2019-08-27/chinas-long-march-technological-supremacy/>; Peter Hartcher, “Power and Paranoia: Why the Chinese government aggressively pushes beyond its borders,” *The Age*, November 23, 2019, accessed October 19, 2020, <https://www.theage.com.au/national/peter-hartcher-on-china-s-infiltration-of-australia-20191118-p53bly.html/>.

116 Mackie, “International Branch Campuses Part Two”.

recruits scholars and technology experts to harvest US and other technologies and intellectual property, partly through the “Thousand Talents” program, a recruitment system geared toward attracting talented Chinese and foreign academics overseas.<sup>117</sup>

Today, espionage is less about catching up and more about surpassing and gaining an edge over geopolitical competitors in an environment in which countering spying has become much harder. Contemporary technological means and global integration both facilitate espionage and complicate its prevention.<sup>118</sup> The US National Counterintelligence and Security Center emphasizes cyber espionage activities by China, Russia and Iran.<sup>119</sup> Today’s R&D espionage mainly focuses on cutting-edge technology, such as in biotech and cancer research, but also on potential dual-use technology that could be used for military purposes.<sup>120</sup> For both the CCP and the Kremlin, seeking fitting research cooperation and collaboration opportunities are integral parts of these efforts.<sup>121</sup>

## Dual Use

When research is meant for civilian purposes but also has military applications, it is referred to as “dual use”.<sup>122</sup> Non-democracies often use civilian research (also that undertaken jointly with foreign partners) for military purposes. The German Federal Office of Economics and Export Control (BAFA), a federal agency, has identified several risk countries that aim to extract information generated through cooperation projects to use it for military purposes.<sup>123</sup> In China, such efforts to develop a domestic military-industrial complex by using ideas developed by civilian sectors are labelled “military-civil fusion.”<sup>124</sup> Dual use is a well-recognized risk and democracies have

---

117 Smriti Mallapaty, “China hides identities of top scientific recruits amidst growing US scrutiny,” *nature*, October 24, 2018, accessed October 19, 2020, <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-018-07167-6>; O’Keeffe and Viswanatha, “Chinese Military Turns to U.S. University”; Wong, “The End of the Harvard Century”.

118 Massimo Pellegrino, “The threat of state-sponsored industrial espionage,” EUISS, 2015, accessed October 19, 2020, [https://www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EUISSFiles/Alert\\_26\\_IndustrialEspionage.pdf/](https://www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EUISSFiles/Alert_26_IndustrialEspionage.pdf/), p. 1; Stephanie Segal and Dylan Gerstel, “Research Collaboration in an Era of Strategic Competition,” Center for Strategic & International Studies, 2019, accessed October 19, 2020, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/research-collaboration-era-strategic-competition>, p. 1.

119 National Counterintelligence and Security Center, “Foreign Economic Espionage in Cyberspace,” 2018, accessed October 19, 2020, <https://www.odni.gov/files/NCSC/documents/news/20180724-economic-espionage-pub.pdf>, p. 5.

120 Ibid.

121 Ibid, p. 6.

122 Jonathan B. Tucker, *Innovation, Dual Use, and Security: Managing the Risks of Emerging Biological and Chemical Technologies*, Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 2012, p. 2; see Bundesamt für Wirtschaft und Ausfuhrkontrolle (BAFA), “Handbuch Exportkontrolle und Academia,” February 2019, accessed October 19, 2020, [https://www.bafa.de/SharedDocs/Downloads/DE/Aussenwirtschaft/afk\\_aca\\_broschuere\\_handbuch.pdf?sessionid=856391F7F7149BC7053845919B11D0C7.2\\_cid378?\\_\\_blob=publicationFile&v=4](https://www.bafa.de/SharedDocs/Downloads/DE/Aussenwirtschaft/afk_aca_broschuere_handbuch.pdf?sessionid=856391F7F7149BC7053845919B11D0C7.2_cid378?__blob=publicationFile&v=4) for a list of dual use fields.

123 BAFA, “Handbuch,” p. 16.

124 BMBF, “China-Strategie,” p. 36; Alex Joske, “Picking Flowers, Making Honey,” Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 2018, accessed October 19, 2020, <https://www.aspi.org.au/report/picking-flowers-making-honey/>, p. 6; Meia Nouwens and Helena Legarda, “Emerging Technology Dominance: What China’s Pursuit of Advanced Dual-Use Technologies Mean for the Future of Europe’s Economy and Defence Innovation,” International Institute for Strategic Studies and Mercator Institute for China Studies, 2018, accessed October 19, 2020, <https://merics.org/en/emerging-technology-dominance>, p. 2.



undertaken many efforts to counteract it. During the Cold War, the United States and its NATO allies used coordinated export control regimes to prevent their technology from reaching the Soviet bloc.<sup>125</sup> However, there are more fields today that could be categorized as potential dual-use areas, such as nuclear research, chemical syntheses, artificial intelligence, robotics, and the life sciences.<sup>126</sup> As a result, designing adequate export control regimes against dual use has become much more complicated.

While policymakers are struggling to keep up, a lack of understanding of the degree of military-academic entanglement in non-democracies also makes it harder for academic and research institutions in liberal democracies to shield themselves against dual use.<sup>127</sup> In China, the CCP and the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) are systematically blurring the line between military and civilian organizations. Visa authorities and universities in democracies often cannot tell whether a Chinese scientist has military affiliations. A common practice to extract research findings for military use is by concealing the end user of the reaped research information.<sup>128</sup> To this end, many colleges and departments in China have purposefully generic names that do not reveal their military functions.<sup>129</sup> Researchers who are affiliated with the PLA are thus able to expand their international network of research collaborations by disguising their military connections. This has led to several cases at German universities where a Chinese guest researcher was later found out to be affiliated with the Chinese military, at the University of Duisburg-Essen and the Helmholtz-Centre in Dresden, among others.<sup>130</sup> At Boston University in the US, a Chinese researcher working on artificial intelligence concealed her position as lieutenant in the Chinese military.<sup>131</sup> A recent case that received considerable public attention involves leading Chinese physicist Pan Jian-Wei, who works on harnessing quantum particles to build computers and tools for information processing and maintained intensive partnerships with universities and scientists in liberal democracies. Recent reports suggest that he is potentially involved with Chinese defense contractors.<sup>132</sup> The UK newspaper *The Times* reported that about 500 Chinese military scientists spent time at British universities in the past decade, working primarily on technology that is relevant for military use.<sup>133</sup> As Anne-Marie Brady has documented for the case of New Zealand, "China's exploitation of civilian

---

125 National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, *Dual Use Research of Concern in the Life Sciences: Current Issues and Controversies*, Washington, DC: The National Academies Press, 2017, accessed October 19, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.17226/24761>, p. 12.

126 Joint Committee on the Handling of Security-Relevant Research, DFG and Leopoldina, "Information on Selected Security-Relevant Research Topics and Case Studies," accessed October 18, 2020, <https://www.leopoldina.org/en/about-us/cooperations/joint-committee-on-dual-use/research-topics-and-case-studies/>.

127 Joske, "Picking Flowers," p. 5; O'Keeffe and Viswanatha, "Chinese Military Turns to U.S. University".

128 BAFA, "Handbuch," p. 16.

129 Joske, "Picking Flowers," p. 11.

130 Claudia Krapp, "Im Austausch mit China nicht naiv sein," *Forschung und Lehre*, February 19, 2020, accessed October 19, 2020, <https://www.forschung-und-lehre.de/politik/im-austausch-mit-china-nicht-naiv-sein-2544/>.

131 O'Keeffe and Viswanatha, "Chinese Military Turns to U.S. University".

132 Jeanne Whalen, "China's Top Quantum Scientist," *The Washington Post*, December 26, 2019, accessed October 19, 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2019/12/26/chinas-top-quantum-scientist-has-ties-countrys-defense-companies/>.

133 Richard Kerbaj and Sian Griffiths, "Security services fear the march on universities of Beijing's spies," *The Times*, October 27, 2019, accessed October 19, 2020, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/security-services-fear-the-march-on-universities-of-beijings-spies-gv9pk3h2r>.

channels for military purposes raises national security, as well as reputational, ethical, and intellectual property risks.”<sup>134</sup>

## Path Dependence

Existing funding frameworks and preferences can create incentives for project-funded organizations to continue exchange and dialogue programs even if they are unproductive or outright counterproductive. Dialogue programs have many worthy goals, such as creating personal connections between participants, exchanging ideas, facilitating diplomacy, and exposing individuals to different viewpoints. But there is a danger for them to turn from a means to an end in itself – or “dialogue for dialogue’s sake.” Ill-designed dialogue projects are easily hijacked by non-democratic actors who impose their preferences and publicly use these programs for their own gain, including self-legitimization. The more independent dialogue organizers from liberal democracies are, and the more they are prepared to walk away if they do not agree with the direction a dialogue is taking, the easier it is for them to counter such tendencies. Put differently, if grantees in liberal democracies are convinced that they will lose funding if they pull the plug on a particular dialogue or if partners from non-democracies chose to disengage, the less willing they will be to address the potential deficiencies of their dialogue programs.

## Indiscriminate Targeting

Thanks to controversial public debates about the Confucius Institutes, Russian influence campaigns in elections in the US and Europe,<sup>135</sup> and – most recently – the Chinese authorities’ intransparent handling of information on the coronavirus outbreak in Wuhan, decision-makers and publics in liberal democracies have become more aware of the potentially harmful influence of non-democracies. However, while greater awareness of risks is generally desirable, there has also been a lack of nuance in some reporting and public statements in liberal democracies. This has created a new basket of dangers for individuals from non-democracies as risk awareness morphs into blanket paranoia or racism.<sup>136</sup>

This puts individuals from non-democratic regimes in the worst of all worlds: not only are they most severely affected by the conduct of their governments,<sup>137</sup> but they are also at risk of becoming victims of an increasingly poisoned climate in many liberal democracies, such as the US or Australia. Current tensions between the US

---

134 Anne-Marie Brady, with Jichang Lulu and Sam Pheloung, “Holding a Pen in One Hand, Gripping a Gun in the Other,” July 2020, accessed October 19, 2020, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/media/uploads/documents/2020-07-HoldingAPenInOneHand-Brady.pdf>.

135 Matt Apuzzo and Adam Satariano, “Russia Is Targeting Europe’s Elections. As Are Far-Right Copycats,” *The New York Times*, May 12, 2019, accessed October 19, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/12/world/europe/russian-propaganda-influence-campaign-european-elections-far-right.html/>.

136 Wong, “The End of the Harvard Century”.

137 Diamond and Schell, “Chinese Influence & American Interests,” p. 73; U.S. House of Representatives, “U.S. Responses,” p. 15; Human Rights Watch, “Turkey: Government Targeting”.



and China and the heightened sensitivities of US homeland security services have led to indeterminate periods of administrative processing for and delayed starts to joint research projects.<sup>138</sup> Shrill political rhetoric can breed suspicion and lead to racialized treatment of certain groups.<sup>139</sup> As a result, Chinese individuals and Chinese-Americans might get unfairly targeted. Similarly, many Chinese researchers already feel that recruitment procedures in the US will no longer be fair.<sup>140</sup> This is also one of the reasons why current US policies are facing heavy criticism for overshooting the mark.<sup>141</sup>

Such heavy-handed treatment of individuals from non-democracies by authorities in liberal democracies may also be exploited by non-democratic governments to shore up support among diaspora communities in liberal democracies. The Kremlin's "compatriot policy," claiming a "Russian World" (*Russkiy Mir*) as a "common civilizational space for all Russians around the world,"<sup>142</sup> for instance, is geared toward Russophone communities in the post-Soviet space, including the Baltic EU member states.<sup>143</sup> Turkish President Erdoğan also caters to disenfranchised Turkish communities<sup>144</sup> – mostly in Western Europe – to leverage their potential discontent for his government's own political gain. In April 2010, the Turkish government even formed a whole Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities (YTB) as a way to systematically approach Turkish diaspora communities, again mainly those residing in Western European countries. YTB has been accused of using its ostensible goal of helping Turkish diaspora communities to conduct espionage operations in their countries of residence. Its leadership is deeply enmeshed in Turkey's political Islamist circles around the ruling party AKP and the Islamist Felicity Party.<sup>145</sup> It is important to note here that the YTB, as an official state body, is also active in academic and youth exchange programs and an important arm of Turkey's strategy to internationalize its higher education system.<sup>146</sup>

Decision-makers and organizations in liberal democracies should strive to talk about the practices and policies of non-democratic political elites as precisely as possible, and to meticulously avoid any rhetoric that might lead to the targeting of individuals on nationality, ethnic or racial grounds.<sup>147</sup> With regard to individuals

138 Dennis Normile, "China's scientists alarmed, bewildered by growing anti-Chinese sentiment in the United States," *Science*, July 31, 2019, accessed October 19, 2020, <https://www.sciencemag.org/news/2019/07/china-s-scientists-alarmed-bewildered-growing-anti-chinese-sentiment-united-states>.

139 Peter Waldman, "The U.S. Is Purging Chinese Cancer Researchers From Top Institutions," *Bloomberg Businessweek*, June 13, 2019, accessed October 19, 2020, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2019-06-13/the-u-s-is-purging-chinese-americans-from-top-cancer-research/>.

140 Mallapaty, "China hides identities".

141 Mallapaty, "China hides identities"; Segal and Gerstel, "Research Collaboration," p. 18.

142 Kristina Kallas, "Claiming the diaspora: Russia's compatriot policy and its reception by Estonian-Russian population," *Journal on Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues in Europe* 15, no. 3, (2016): pp.1-25, p. 6.

143 Igor Zevelev, "The Russian World in Moscow's Strategy," Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2016, accessed October 2019, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/russian-world-moscows-strategy/>.

144 See website of the Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities (YTB), YTB, "Institution," accessed August 5, 2020, <https://www.ytb.gov.tr/en/corporate/institution/>.

145 Abdullah Bozkurt, "Turkey's diaspora agency hides expenditures that fund clandestine operations abroad," *Nordic Monitor*, August 23, 2019, accessed October 19, 2020, <https://www.nordicmonitor.com/2019/08/turkeys-diaspora-agency-unlawfully-hides-spending-that-funds-sensitive-operations-abroad/>.

146 YTB, "International Student Mobility," accessed October 19, 2020, <https://www.ytb.gov.tr/en/international-students/international-student-mobility/>.

147 U.S. House of Representatives, "U.S. Responses," p. 18.

with Chinese heritage, Mareike Ohlberg and Clive Hamilton make a clear case: “Chinese-heritage people in the West, and elsewhere, are the foremost targets of CCP intimidation. The threat to conform to Beijing’s wishes or be punished is often severe. The rights of these people need protection; those among them willing to speak out must be supported, and those who threaten them should be prosecuted. The language used in the pushback should never fall into the trap of conflating the CPP with the Chinese people.”<sup>148</sup> The same applies to individuals of Russian or Turkish origin. Democracies have a lot of work to do on this front. And it is crucial that those speaking out against the practices of authoritarian countries and their enablers inside democracies also clearly condemn any unfair or even racist targeting at home.

---

148 Clive Hamilton and Mareike Ohlberg, *Hidden Hand*, p. 268.

# Strategies and Instruments

To better achieve their own goals and make the most of opportunities for research cooperation and dialogue programs, institutions and individuals in democracies need good strategies and instruments that allow them to address the manifold risks involved when cooperating with non-democracies. Any cooperation project or institutional relationship is different and carries its own set of unique challenges that are contingent on the respective context. With this in mind, and instead of simply listing a set of general recommendations for dealing with these risks, we compiled a list of suggestions, strategies and lessons learned from institutions and practitioners that can inspire individuals and institutions to review their own cooperation policies and practices.

## Understand the Context

Before embarking on cooperation projects, organizations in democracies need to understand the political, economic, cultural, and historical contexts in which they will operate. Only adequate country-specific or regional expertise can ensure that organizations adequately take the respective context into account when planning future projects.

1. **Foster and use country-specific and regional expertise and make it available to others.** This expertise should combine a thorough understanding of a country's or region's context with corresponding language skills. Integrating country or regional expertise is a necessary prerequisite for planning any cooperation project with counterparts from non-democracies.<sup>149</sup> The focus should not only be on utilizing this expertise to enhance cooperation by simply 'understanding the other side'; the goal should rather be to gather necessary specific information to feed into a comprehensive assessment of the potential risks of the planned cooperation project.<sup>150</sup>

For partners in non-democracies, the space to formulate goals and interests independently from interference is much more limited than in liberal democracies.

---

149 BMBF, "China-Strategie," p. 34; Bundesregierung, "Aktivitäten chinesischer Konfuzius-Institute," p. 8. We applaud initiatives such as the recent call for applications by the German Federal Ministry of Education for research projects that enhance China expertise and build networks among current experts. At the same time, we note with concern that human rights infringements were not explicitly mentioned among the potential "societal challenges" referenced in the call. See BMBF, "Bekanntmachung," May 6, 2020, accessed October 19, 2020, <https://www.bmbf.de/foerderungen/bekanntmachung-3020.html/>.

150 The Lisa Meitner Research Group on China in the Global System of Science by the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science, which was founded in July 2020, promises not to shy away from looking into the CCP's political utilization of science. See the project page, Lisa Meitner Research Group, "China the Global System of Science," Max Planck Institute of History of Science, accessed October 19, 2020, <https://www.mpiwg-berlin.mpg.de/research/departments/lise-meitner-research-group/>.

This is why a good grasp of the interests of the respective partner country's government authorities and how these affect one's counterparts in non-democracies is big part of assessing the risks and challenges (but also the possibilities) of potential cooperation projects. Organizations from liberal democracies need to watch out for potential clashes between their own values and interests and those of the autocratic government in question.<sup>151</sup>

2. **Use regional expertise to formulate strategies for dealing with restrictions and constraints imposed on cooperation projects by authoritarian governments.** Experts on a specific region or local partners (especially in less consolidated authoritarian systems) know how to circumvent the rules of their governments as well as how to tweak projects in such a way that they get approved without being too heavily scrutinized by the respective authorities.<sup>152</sup> They can also help organizations in democracies develop a better understanding of how to best frame critical thoughts or ideas in, for instance, research cooperation, which is particularly helpful for scholars who work on contentious issues.<sup>153</sup> Finding the right tone without capitulating to illiberal restrictions is a constant balancing act that requires extensive contextual knowledge.
3. **Continue to draw on country and regional expertise throughout the cooperation process, including for regular strategy reviews.**
4. **Use tools such as the Academic Freedom Index (AFi) to assess risks to academic freedom.** Funders could make such risk assessments mandatory for cooperation projects that concern all countries with a low AFi score.<sup>154</sup>
5. **Develop and implement preparatory and follow-up seminars for individuals who are engaged in cooperation projects.** Such seminars should offer room for participants to reflect on the specific risks and challenges that come with working in non-democratic contexts. Moreover, they should raise awareness for the logic and methods of authoritarian propaganda narratives and foster an understanding of the constraints faced by program partners and participants from non-democracies. Participants should also learn about the types of human rights violations that occur in their respective fields of cooperation as well as the privileges they might enjoy because they are from democratic countries. When preparing youth or student exchange programs, this could include contextualizing experiences that former students have made.

---

<sup>151</sup> Joske, "Picking Flowers," p. 19.

<sup>152</sup> D'Hooghe et al., "Assessing Europe-China Collaboration," p. 20.

<sup>153</sup> Diamond and Schell, "Chinese Influence and American Interests," p. 72.

<sup>154</sup> Katrin Kinzelbach, Ilyas Saliba, Janika Spannagel, and Robert Quinn, "Free Universities: Putting the Academic Freedom Index into Action," Global Public Policy Institute, March 26, 2020, accessed October 20, 2020, <https://www.gppi.net/2020/03/26/free-universities>.

## Invest in Due Diligence

Various cases involving researchers from non-democracies with military links or espionage assignments show that proper due diligence needs to be a key feature of all potentially sensitive cooperation and exchange endeavors. When they are aware of the relevant risks, organizations and individuals can screen and prepare for them more easily and appropriately.

This requires a better understanding of the type of risks involved in different kinds of research. Using a typology dating back to the Reagan administration, research can be categorized into fundamental research, sharable research, and restricted research due to proprietary or national security considerations.<sup>155</sup> Moreover, the Australian Strategic Policy Institute's China Defence Universities Tracker provides a helpful tool on China-specific risks and bases its own categorization of research activities on the system used by the PRC's Ministry of Education.<sup>156</sup>

6. **Identify research areas that are sensitive** based on an analysis of the economic or security interests of the respective non-democratic government.
7. **Build a categorization system** for research areas based on how prone they are to risks like espionage or theft. Based on that system, different policies (e.g., on access or confidentiality) should apply. Identifying potential areas for dual use is already a common practice in most organizations and governments.

The German BAFA, for example, provides a list of areas that are of particular relevance for dual use.<sup>157</sup> However, new dual-use areas constantly emerge due to rapid technological developments, which is why such lists need continuous updating. Organizations involved in science cooperation should strive to stay on top of new, potentially risky technological developments.

8. **Develop in-house expertise on dual-use applications at large research funders, both public and private**, to advise researchers and institutions.
9. **Deepen information and intelligence sharing** to educate partners on high-risk areas and new technologies to support them in adapting restrictions where this might be necessary.<sup>158</sup>

Investments in due diligence should put organizations in a position to make informed decisions about the entities from non-democracies with which they want to – or do not want to – associate themselves. At the same time, identifying low-risk cooperation areas upfront allows organizations to approach every new cooperation project with only the degree of caution that is warranted.

---

155 National Security Council. "NSDD-189: National policy on the transfer of scientific, technical and engineering information," 1985, accessed October 19, 2020, <http://www.fas.org/irp/offdocs/nsdd/nsdd-189.htm>

156 See China Defence University Tracker, accessed October 19, 2020, <https://unitracker.aspi.org.au/topics/>.

157 BAFA, "Handbuch," p. 13.

158 Segal and Gerstel, "Research Collaboration," p. 21.

10. **Limit restrictions on collaboration** to those areas that pose an identified threat to national security. Any restrictions should be clearly articulated and targeted.<sup>159</sup>

Once they have all the potential red flags on their radar, organizations can start their screening.

11. **Conduct rigorous background checks** on potential cooperation partners from non-democracies before entering into a cooperation agreement.<sup>160</sup> Explicitly check for contacts to the military, government affiliations and potential complicity in human rights violations.
12. **Draw on a diverse array of resources and experts** to conduct background checks. Potential resources include information-sharing services and incident trackers. Country and regional expertise should be combined with topic expertise, for instance, from the defense and emerging technologies sectors.<sup>161</sup>

While espionage activities are most prevalent in scientific research, recent reports have indicated that seemingly harmless cultural institutes and GONGOs are also used as vehicles for intelligence gathering and intimidation efforts – which makes comprehensive screening for ‘bad apples’ harder.<sup>162</sup> Here, organizations have to rely more heavily on past experiences with these organizations and their leadership.

13. **Consult others who were previously involved in similar cooperation projects** and refer to incident trackers for information on potential problems that came up during cooperation. This should include looking into the leadership of individual organizations as well as screening different types of organizations from specific countries rather than only screening specific organizations.
14. **When vetting seemingly independent organizations in non-democracies, pay close attention to links between their leadership and broader governmental elites** from non-democracies.

## Expand Security Protections

In recent years, breaches of privacy as well as incidents of espionage and outright repressive actions have become more frequent, which demonstrates the need to ramp up security provisions in organizations involved in cooperation with non-democracies.

---

<sup>159</sup> Segal and Gerstel, “Research Collaboration,” p. 21.

<sup>160</sup> Department of Education, Skills and Employment, “Guidelines to Counter Foreign Interference in the Australian University Sector,” November 13, 2019, accessed October 19, 2020, p. 14.

<sup>161</sup> D’Hooghe et al., “Assessing Europe-China Collaboration,” p. 13; Joske, “Picking Flowers,” p. 19.

<sup>162</sup> European Parliament, *European Parliament resolution of 23 November 2016*; Smagli, *Hybrid Analytica*, p. 22, 24; Vojtišková et al., “The Bear in Sheep’s Clothing,” p. 42.

15. **Do not share personal information.**<sup>163</sup> This could be information collected during interviews (e.g., for studies or other research outputs) or information about staff. Personal information includes data such as ID, tax or passport numbers, bank account numbers, personal addresses, or information on family members.
16. **Restrict cooperation partners' access to information** in areas where information is prone to misuse (such as for dual use).<sup>164</sup> Within research organizations in democracies, nationality should only be a criterion for access restrictions in areas that concern highly sensitive national security interests to protect against citizens of non-democracies being subjected to pressure from their governments to engage in spying activities. In other areas, it should not be individuals' nationality but their previous and present affiliations that determine whether or not they will be granted access to information.

Current debates in the US about heavily restricting access to information for Chinese scholars funded through the “Thousand Talents Program” (TTP) show how serious of a concern – and thus how credible a threat – such access restrictions are for the CCP. In this particular case, restrictions are motivated by economic concerns as well as a fear of intellectual property theft. Some researchers who initially considered applying for the TTP are now having second thoughts as they do not want to risk access to the US higher education and research space.<sup>165</sup> This example shows that access restrictions can also send a signal to counterparts in non-democracies about the trade-offs they may need to consider if they want to continue to be part of the research space in democracies. As much as possible, such measures should not come at the cost of an open research environment, which thrives on resource and experience sharing across borders.<sup>166</sup>

17. **Formulate clear criteria for when access restrictions should apply** so as to not endanger open science and data initiatives.<sup>167</sup>

In addition to access restrictions, cyber espionage and data theft warrant that organizations in democracies prioritize security of their digital infrastructures and platforms.

18. **Invest in IT security** to protect data, individuals' or institutions' research, and other sensible information from theft.<sup>168</sup> Pay special attention to data and

---

163 The DVCS (“Handlungsempfehlungen”) strictly advises against sharing personal information with Chinese partners. See DVCS, “Handlungsempfehlungen der Deutschen Vereinigung für Chinastudien e.V. zum Umgang deutscher akademischer Institutionen mit der Volksrepublik China,” December 29, 2018, accessed October 19, 2020, <http://www.dvcs.eu/dokumente/handlungsempfehlungen.pdf>, p. 4.

164 Joske, “Picking Flowers,” p. 19; BAFA, “Handbuch,” p. 14.

165 Mallapaty, “China hides identities”.

166 “Coronavirus: three things all governments and their science advisers must do now,” *nature*, March 17, 2020, accessed October 19, 2020, <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-020-00772-4>.

167 See examples of such initiatives in Joyce Lau, “Coronavirus crisis inspiring unprecedented global research effort,” *Times Higher Education*, March 25, 2020, accessed October 19, 2020, <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/coronavirus-crisis-inspiring-unprecedented-global-research-effort#survey-answer>.

168 Diamond and Schell, “Chinese Influence and American Interests,” p. 52.

research activities in dual-use areas. Smaller organizations should receive support from their funders to increase their data security capabilities.

Increased security provisions can burden those who have to adhere to them, including through considerable bureaucratic hassle. But the investment to convince staff that such procedures are necessary is worth it.

19. **Implement regular trainings** on best practices in protecting and handling sensible information, especially in the realm of dual-use technology, to **increase awareness of the importance of information security**.<sup>169</sup> Using concrete case studies to train staff could be an option to ensure that staff members know how to react in certain situations.<sup>170</sup>
20. **Prepare guidelines that are easy to use**, such as “cheat sheets” and Q&As, to help cooperation practitioners internalize appropriate procedures and risk preparedness measures.<sup>171</sup> One example is the German BAFA’s cheat sheet on risks related to dual use<sup>172</sup>, but there is certainly room to provide even more user-friendly resources (e.g., in the form of interactive support and information websites). **Limit additional regulations to the bare minimum** and take into account that each new layer of provisions will add more red tape for those who have to implement them. Overly complicated or cumbersome rules and processes can quickly backfire.<sup>173</sup>
21. **Educate staff, clients or students on “safe behavior online”** as well as the corresponding threat environment.

Organizations have to keep in mind that circumstances can change rapidly. New technologies give rise to new cyber risks, and changing political circumstances make certain infringements likelier than others. This demands constant adaptation and flexibility.

22. **Regularly review and adjust guidelines and security procedures** to ensure that they remain up to date. Ideally, organizations should do so every time they enter into a new and/or bigger international cooperation project with a partner or partners from non-democratic contexts.
23. **Schedule trainings and refresher sessions before new cooperation projects start** to ensure that staff members remain alert and sensitive to risks.

---

169 Diamond and Schell, “Chinese Influence and American Interests,” p. 51; BAFA, “Handbuch,” p. 14.

170 See Department of Education, “Guidelines to counter the foreign interference,” p. 38f for examples of case study exercises that could be used, in this case for university staff.

171 The Australian Department for Education offers a comprehensive catalogue of questions in their *Guidelines to Counter the Foreign Interference in the Australian University Sector* for university executives and researchers, ranging from questions on due diligence and conflict of interest issues to awareness raising and institutional capabilities. Accessed October 20, 2020 via [https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/ed19-0222--int--ufit\\_guidelines\\_acc.pdf](https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/ed19-0222--int--ufit_guidelines_acc.pdf).

172 BAFA, “Handbuch,” p. 19.

173 Department of Education, “Guidelines to counter the foreign interference,” p. 9.



It is important to keep in mind that it takes considerable effort to stay up to date on the changing nature of risk environments and new technologies. The same is true for organizing regular, high-quality trainings. This cannot be an after-thought but needs to be an integral part of any cooperation and exchange effort.

24. **Institutionalize risk assessments, security strategizing and internal compliance procedures** by setting up ‘compliance desks’.<sup>174</sup> In Germany, the German Research Foundation (DFG) and Leopoldina maintain a joint committee on dual use<sup>175</sup> as well as an overview of the relevant points of contact for universities dealing with issues that are sensitive or involve security concerns.<sup>176</sup> Depending on the organization and the corresponding risks involved in cooperating with counterparts from non-democracies, compliance desks need to be staffed with the right experts. For instance, research institutions working in the STEM fields should definitely have in-house experts on dual-use technologies. These compliance desks could also be responsible for updating security provisions and organizing staff trainings.<sup>177</sup>

## Improve Cooperation Procedures

To address the risks of cooperation in an increasingly volatile environment and still maintain productive cooperation projects, organizations in democracies must develop more mindful, thoughtful and well-informed cooperation procedures. Doing so requires a clear vision of the objectives of cooperation as well as the risk assessments and other due diligence measures that need to be in place before cooperation projects can launch.

25. **Formulate clear rules** (such as codes of conducts) for properly approaching interactions with entities from non-democracies before entering into any type of cooperation contract.<sup>178</sup>
26. **Check whether the proposed contractual conditions align with the organization’s overarching values.** To make this process easier and guide potential internal discussions on the proposed conditions for cooperation, it can be helpful to have a standardized, comprehensive set of questions to ask when reviewing a contract. These should be rooted in an organization’s core values.

---

<sup>174</sup> BAFA, “Handbuch,” p. 86f.

<sup>175</sup> Leopoldina, “Mandate and Objectives of the Joint Committee on the Handling of Security-Relevant Research,” accessed October 19, 2020, <https://www.leopoldina.org/en/about-us/cooperations/joint-committee-on-dual-use/dual-use/>.

<sup>176</sup> Leopoldina, “Contact persons and committees in Germany responsible for ethics concerning security-relevant research,” accessed October 19, 2020, <https://www.leopoldina.org/en/about-us/cooperations/joint-committee-dual-use/list-of-committees/>. The list illustrates the big differences between research institutions when it comes to how well prepared they are to handle potential infringements. While some organizations have an institutionalized procedure to attend to security-sensitive issues, including an ombudsperson, others handle those on a case-by-case basis or simply do not provide for any procedures of that kind.

<sup>177</sup> BAFA, “Handbuch,” p. 87.

<sup>178</sup> ALLEA, “The European Code,” p. 5.

27. **Protect core values and wider interests by integrating control and sanctions mechanisms** in contracts with cooperation partners from non-democracies.<sup>179</sup>

In particular, universities and research facilities should focus on values regarding academic freedom, which can be jeopardized by poorly designed cooperation contracts.

28. **Emphasize academic freedom and integrity**, including non-discriminatory hiring practices and balanced curricula and especially in university and research cooperation.<sup>180</sup>

When reviewing contracts, organizations have to make sure to take into account documented incidents from previous cooperation projects with organizations from the respective countries.

29. **Do not allow for foreign jurisdiction over any partnership contracts that govern activities in liberal democracies.**

However, even the most thoroughly discussed contract cannot guard against each and every potential development or future threat.

30. **Make sure to always have the legal option and be ready to terminate a contract if necessary.**<sup>181</sup>

All contracts with partners from non-democracies should be handled with maximum transparency to enable the necessary public scrutiny. This will add to the trustworthiness of institutions that engage in cooperation with partners from non-democracies, improve compliance by enabling accountability<sup>182</sup>, and also justify heightened scrutiny for each case where contract details are not made transparent.

31. **Disclose contracts with partners in non-democracies** to ensure transparency and accountability, and to demonstrate that normative and security questions have been appropriately considered.

32. **Make information about cooperation arrangements with partners from non-democracies more accessible** by explicitly stating who gets funding from whom and for which purposes, who the cooperation partners are, and which joint activities the cooperation entails.<sup>183</sup>

---

179 ALLEA, “The European Code,” p.7.

180 Human Rights Watch, “China: Government Threats”.

181 DVCS, “Handlungsempfehlungen,” p. 4.

182 Peterson, “Outsourced to China,” p. 148; ALLEA, “The European Code,” p. 5; Diamond and Schell, “Chinese Influence and American Interests,” p. 50.

183 DVCS, “Handlungsempfehlungen,” p. 2; JASON, “Fundamental Research Security,” The MITRE Corporation, December 2019, accessed October 19, 2020 [https://nsf.gov/news/special\\_reports/jasonsecurity/JSR-19-2IF-FundamentalResearchSecurity\\_12062019FINAL.pdf](https://nsf.gov/news/special_reports/jasonsecurity/JSR-19-2IF-FundamentalResearchSecurity_12062019FINAL.pdf), p. 3; Human Rights Watch, “China: Government Threats”.

33. **Demand full transparency** from cooperation partners concerning their sources of funding, potential government ties, and the relevant staff's backgrounds.<sup>184</sup> This includes paying attention to any potential links with businesspeople who might have close ties to the respective non-democratic governments or who are part of inner circles of government elites.<sup>185</sup>

It is unlikely that simply asking for it will automatically yield the degree of transparency that organizations in liberal democracies demand, but it is nevertheless important to constantly mention transparency and accountability in discussions with partners from non-democracies. When cooperation partners withhold important information, these cases need to be treated with seriousness.

34. **Define and enforce consequences for cooperation partners from non-democracies that withhold information** about government or military ties or funding.<sup>186</sup>

35. **Make sure researchers and staff members comply with disclosure rules.**

Often, the necessary rules are already in place, but there is either a complete lack of enforcement or disclosure breaches are treated as cavalier missteps.

36. **Enhance efforts to enforce existing policies.**<sup>187</sup> This includes taking stock of the different (types of) disclosure policies that are already in place as well as of how their enforcement and implementation were handled before.

Finally, certain cooperation engagements are simply not worth entering into.

37. **Be selective when choosing cooperation projects.** Organizations and funders should see the above procedural and transparency criteria as quality markers and make them a part of their funding decisions.

38. **Abandon the idea and practice of “dialogue for dialogue’s sake.”** Organizations should ask themselves whether attending a dialogue event or participating in a cooperation project will add any concrete value for them. The benefits of networking should be weighed against the risks of being instrumentalized for authoritarian PR.<sup>188</sup>

39. **Educate staff who participate in dialogue activities with non-democracies about the fine line between cultural sensitivity and self-censorship.** Regular discussions, workshops and briefings on such matters can equip individuals with

---

184 See Joske, “Picking Flowers,” p. 19.

185 Smagliy, *Hybrid Analytica*, p. 11.

186 Department of Education, “Guidelines to counter the foreign interference,” p. 13.

187 Segal and Gerstel, “Research Collaboration,” p. 21.

188 Smagliy, *Hybrid Analytica*, p. 18f; Barbashin and Graef, “Thinking foreign policy in Russia,” p. 17.

the necessary knowledge and tools to navigate international dialogue events without falling back onto polite platitudes. Organizations need to empower their staff to clearly name the elephant in the room while still respecting the rules of intercultural engagement.

## Build a Culture of Integrity

International research cooperation and exchange programs have not only become an entry point for non-democratic actors who seek to influence or otherwise benefit from them; they are also increasingly a stage for the global competition of systems between liberal democracies and authoritarian systems. Limited awareness about this competition and inadequate strategies to handle it have allowed authoritarian norms to creep into international cooperation projects. “Creep” is the correct term here, because these developments are often so subtle that they do not raise any red flags at first. To make their staff and structures more resilient in the face of authoritarian advances, organizations in liberal democracies should aim to foster and strengthen a culture of integrity. In an environment that strongly values integrity, individuals will be more sensitive toward norm breaches. To build such a culture, organizations need to start with their junior staff. Senior staff, on the other hand, need to lead by example.

40. **Incorporate core organizational values into the education and training of junior staff.**<sup>189</sup> Such efforts need to go beyond abstract or purely theoretical discussions about values (which should still take place). Organizations need to construct a framework of rules that supports their values. That should include clear communication about and guidance on what is desirable and appropriate (and what is not).<sup>190</sup>
41. **Maintain an open discussion about the validity of the rules that the organization derives from its key values.** This will help generate greater buy-in for these values and rules among staff members.
42. **Prepare a checklist of potential red flags** to serve as guidance for junior (and senior) staff. While the overarching goal should be to foster a critical view on organizational and individual behavior, simple and practical lists can make it easier for staff to get a sense of what constitutes red flags and help address initial insecurities – especially if staff are still at the beginning of their time at the organization. More senior staff can use checklists as reminders or back-up. The Hague Centre for Strategic Studies and the Leiden Asia Centre provide a model checklist that organizations can use as a blueprint.<sup>191</sup>

---

189 ALLEA, “The European Code,” p.5.

190 James G. March and Johan P. Olsen, “The Logic of Appropriateness,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Science*, ed. Robert E. Goodin, Oxford University Press, 2011, pp. 479–497, p. 480.

191 Frank Bekkers et al., “Checklist for Collaboration with Chinese Universities and Other Research Institutions,” The Hague Centre for Strategic Studies, 2019, accessed October 19, 2020, <https://hcss.nl/report/checklist-collaboration-chinese-universities-and-other-research-institutions/>.

In addition to doing their own homework, organizations should deliberately open themselves up for public scrutiny to show their willingness to adhere to their own principles and rules on matters such as maintaining academic freedom or defending freedom of expression.

43. **Draft and publish codes of conduct or value statements** that show the bigger picture of what the organization stands for and how it plans to protect and enact those values in its day-to-day activities.<sup>192</sup>

Ultimately, the only way to show how serious an organization takes its own integrity is through instituting a sophisticated set of control and sanctions mechanisms.

44. **Establish strong, transparent internal control and accountability mechanisms** to ensure that the organization acts in accordance with its own stated values.
45. **Establish an ombudsperson** for cases of infringement, for instance, on academic freedom or in the form of undisclosed financial links.<sup>193</sup> Inform staff (and, in the case of universities, students) about their rights and how to recognize common infringement patterns so they know when to approach the ombudsperson.<sup>194</sup>
46. **Conduct regular anonymous surveys of all staff involved in cooperation with non-democracies to identify areas for improvement.**
47. **Commission regular external reviews** of the organization. These can either be conducted by specialized evaluators or by other organizations with similar value statements through peer review networks. When handled on the basis of reciprocity between participating organizations (and thus free of charge), the latter could be especially fitting for smaller organizations with limited budgets.

Beyond the inner workings of organizations that are cooperating with partners in non-democracies, the foundations that are funding such activities should also take responsibility for fostering a whole-of-society culture of integrity.

48. **Support a pro-democratic, ‘watchdog’ civil society** in liberal democracies to build the structures that are necessary for a functioning domestic culture of scrutiny and monitoring of institutions that are too close to or too dependent on authoritarian funding (or other forms of influence).<sup>195</sup>

---

192 Hughes, “Confucius Institutes and the university,” p. 75; Diamond and Schell, “Chinese Influence and American Interests,” p. 53, 77; Human Rights Watch published such a code of conduct in March 2019 for academic institutions with regards to China, see: Human Rights Watch, “China: Government Threats”.

193 DVCS, “Handlungsempfehlungen,” p. 3; Human Rights Watch, “China: Government Threats”.

194 Human Rights Watch, “China: Government Threats”; see: Ombudsman für die Wissenschaft, “Liste der lokalen Ombudspersonen,” accessed October 19, 2020, <https://ombudsman-fuer-die-wissenschaft.de/liste-der-ombudspersonen/> for a comprehensive pooling and listing of ombudspersons from more than 700 science organizations in Germany. On the same website, experts offer independent consulting services on issues of research integrity and ethics.

195 Vojtíšková et al., “The Bear in Sheep’s Clothing,” p. 12.

While this is key, it is also important to keep in mind that an impetus to foster and act with integrity often raises very practical challenges. Financial pressures, the need to ‘keep up’ with scientific progress, and other concerns can put organizations in a difficult position. A whole-of-society approach to integrity thus needs to include measures that alleviate some of these difficulties and make it easier for organizations – especially smaller ones – to prioritize integrity by promoting their independence.

49. **Make sure that cooperation projects do not depend on funding from non-democratic governments or businesses or foundations that are close to such governments.** Instead, organizations should prioritize independent project funding by looking for domestic funders or funders in other liberal democracies.<sup>196</sup> This effectively means that the total amount of funding for research and civil society organizations will have to increase. The bulk of this increase should eventually come from public bodies to lessen the attractiveness of funds from non-democracies.<sup>197</sup> Of course, international cooperation projects can be co-funded by counterparts from non-democracies. But such funding should be limited to providing for partner organizations’ own staff costs and on-the-ground activities in non-democratic settings.<sup>198</sup> Under no circumstances should staff costs of organizations in liberal democracies be covered by funds from autocracies.

Funders should adapt their funding and budgeting procedures to make it easier for organizations on the receiving end to mitigate or deal with the risks involved in cooperating with partners in non-democracies.

50. **Provide flexible project guidelines** that enable organizations to spend money more creatively, try out new formats and better react to unforeseen circumstances.
51. **Form alliances between funders who are committed to the principles of liberal democracy.** When clearly fostering integrity, such alliances can act as a more visible source of potential funding for value-based cooperation projects. At the same time, stronger cooperation between funding organizations and a pooling of resources could enable funding for bigger, more ambitious projects. Such projects could aim at, for instance, building certain research infrastructures that are currently lacking in certain democratic countries. This way, organizations involved in research cooperation do not depend as much on access to infrastructures in non-democratic contexts.

---

196 Benner, “It’s Time for Think Tanks”; see also the Hudson Institute’s Integrity and Transparency Policy as an example: <https://www.hudson.org/transparency/>.

197 European Parliament, *European Parliament resolution of 23 November 2016*; Peterson, “Outsourced to China”, p. 148.

198 See Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, “Joint Sino-German Research Projects 2020,” December 2, 2019, accessed October 19, 2020, [https://www.dfg.de/foerderung/info\\_wissenschaft/2019/info\\_wissenschaft\\_19\\_81/index.html/](https://www.dfg.de/foerderung/info_wissenschaft/2019/info_wissenschaft_19_81/index.html/) as an example of a co-funded project where each side pays for research conducted on their respective territories. Ideally, this should also include that each side covers the salary costs of their own researchers.

52. **Use funding guidelines to incentivize a culture of integrity** by making funding conditional on corresponding good practices. A positive example from the sphere of research are the *Guidelines for Safeguarding Good Research Practice* by the German Research Foundation (DFG), which were published in August 2019. Following these guidelines, the DFG only provides funding to organizations that establish those same guidelines in a legally binding manner, granting them an adjustment period until July 2021.<sup>199</sup>
53. **Prohibit any direct financial links between student groups and non-democratic governments.** Student groups at universities in democracies should be forbidden to receive any funding from foreign governments without explicit approval from the respective university.<sup>200</sup> As part of the approval process, university administrators can then check for potential links to non-democratic governments. Of course, this implies that student groups are required to disclose information about their funders.<sup>201</sup>

## Stand for and Live Your Values

The environment in which international cooperation projects with non-democracies take place today is one in which spaces for independent and diverse civil societies are shrinking dramatically. What is more, non-democracies increasingly seek to reach beyond their own borders and limit the possibilities of researchers and civil society actors in democratic contexts. The best protection against such authoritarian advances is to actively promote the opposite model: free, vibrant, diverse spaces of thought. For many organizations in liberal democracies, this means starting with a self-confident articulation of what they stand for – and what they want to guard against.

54. **Publicly stand in for and pursue your values**, including freedoms and rights for research, dialogue and civil society. This should include promoting counter-narratives to those propagated by non-democratic governments.<sup>202</sup>
55. Publicly commit to core values such as academic freedom or freedom of expression and do so starting at the highest institutional levels.<sup>203</sup> **Provide high-level visible support for like-minded individuals and organizations when they are under pressure.**

---

199 See DFG, “Gute wissenschaftliche Praxis,” July 6, 2020, accessed October 19, 2020, [https://www.dfg.de/foerderung/grundlagen\\_rahmenbedingungen/gwp/](https://www.dfg.de/foerderung/grundlagen_rahmenbedingungen/gwp/), which includes the guidelines in German and English as well as information on the implementation process of those guidelines.

200 Larry Diamond, “Comment,” in “How Should Universities Respond to China’s Growing Presence On Their Campuses?”, *ChinaFile*, accessed October 19, 2020, <http://www.chinafile.com/conversation/how-should-universities-respond-chinas-growing-presence-their-campuses>.

201 Human Rights Watch, “China: Government Threats”.

202 European Parliament, *European Parliament resolution of 23 November 2016*.

203 Ibid; Deniz Ertin, “The democratic potential of the Turkish civil society for better EU-Turkey relations,” VIADUCT, 2018, accessed October 19, 2020, [http://www.viaduct.uni-koeln.de/sites/monteus/user\\_upload/Policy\\_Paper\\_I\\_Ertin\\_.pdf/](http://www.viaduct.uni-koeln.de/sites/monteus/user_upload/Policy_Paper_I_Ertin_.pdf/), p. 5; Human Rights Watch, “China: Government Threats”.



56. **Directly and publicly name and condemn authoritarian practices where they affect your staff or your organization as a whole and stand in solidarity with peers.** Organizations in liberal democracies should not only recognize but also publicly name threats to their values and do so at the highest institutional levels.<sup>204</sup> Organizations that aim to be diplomatic often fall back onto euphemisms when talking about serious human rights violations and atrocities. But anything short of clearly seeing and naming such abuses for what they are comes close to complicity. It also aids authoritarian governments in their efforts to reframe narratives about their repressive actions or blame the victims of their oppression.
57. **Provide moral and, if possible, financial support to monitoring bodies or organizations that work to expose and counter human rights violations and atrocities.** Such organizations play an important role in public naming and shaming and are often involved in efforts to document violations for when national or international prosecution becomes possible.<sup>205</sup>

As institutions with an explicit education mandate, universities should spearhead such clear and public communication.

58. **Design mandatory introductory courses aimed at fostering critical and independent thinking,** especially for study programs with typically high numbers of students from non-democracies. Universities in liberal democracies with students from non-democracies should help these students (and their other students) develop their critical thinking skills and teach the value of fundamental freedoms such as freedom of speech and academic freedom – ideally not only as abstract concepts, but as lived experiences. Such courses should be a mix of philosophy of science and applicable knowledge about research integrity practices. Every student, but especially those in the STEM fields that often lack these types of courses, would benefit from such dedicated spaces for critical reflection on the nature and conditions of independent science. Such courses promise to be particularly rich if students come from a variety of different political systems. This would force students to engage with each other and work through their differences in an orderly, constructive manner. It would also provide for an intellectual as well as an intercultural exchange.<sup>206</sup> While many universities offer courses in that direction, these are often optional.<sup>207</sup>

---

204 Human Rights Watch, “China: Government Threats”; Skokova, “Russia: More funding but less stability,” p. 166.

205 Skokova, “Russia: More funding but less stability,” p. 166; Civil Rights Defenders, “Never Give Up,” p. 26.

206 Diamond, “Comment”; Vicky Xiuzhong Xu, “Comment,” in “How Should Universities Respond to China’s Growing Presence On Their Campuses?,” *ChinaFile*, accessed October 19, 2020, <http://www.chinafile.com/conversation/how-should-universities-respond-chinas-growing-presence-their-campuses>.

207 On its website, the German science academy Leopoldina highlights positive examples of universities that implemented modules and courses on good scientific practice and research integrity. However, most of these positive examples only provide resources or make the offer to students to educate themselves further on such issues. Obligatory modules comprise only a small minority among the programs listed. See Leopoldina, “Anchoring Security-Relevant Aspects of Research in Education and Teaching,” accessed October 19, 2020, <https://www.leopoldina.org/en/about-us/cooperations/joint-committee-on-dual-use/dual-use-education-and-teaching/>.

Making them a mandatory part of students' education would not only ensure that all students have this experience at least once, but it would also signal that universities and schools regard those topics and questions as a fundamental part of their respective academic discipline.

At the same time, it is imperative that universities not only educate but also perceive it as their responsibility to protect and support their staff and students from authoritarian influencing attempts or, in the case of foreign staff and students, pressures from their authoritarian governments at home.

59. **Train and inform your staff and students on their rights** and educate them about how they can protect themselves through legal measures.<sup>208</sup> Help them exercise their rights.<sup>209</sup>
60. **Protect and support foreign staff and students who are critical of their government.** This could include supporting them with visa or immigration procedures, or providing or recommending counselling or legal support.<sup>210</sup>
61. **Introduce a confidential complaint procedure** that staff and students can use if they find that a peer or anyone else with access to the organization engages in intimidation or espionage activities, or if they themselves feel pressured to self-censor or have experienced discrimination.

Organizations in liberal democracies should take extra care to counter racist and xenophobic tendencies.

62. **Draft targeted policies** by focusing on specific, egregious forms of behavior or affiliations rather than on identity markers such as ethnicity or nationality.

The most ambitious and possibly most risky step for organizations is to promote universal values in authoritarian settings. While such steps are potentially the most powerful, they should also be implemented in such a way that the personal well-being and safety of staff and partners on the ground is not threatened.

63. **Support like-minded CSOs in non-democracies through long-term financial engagement.** Funding organizations should keep in mind that independent CSOs in non-democracies are often targets of government-sponsored harassment and debilitating legislation that usually results in higher costs, for instance for legal fees.<sup>211</sup> In addition, independent CSOs in non-democratic contexts are often dependent on funds from liberal democratic countries. In the Turkish academic sphere, for example, many projects are financed through the EU's *Horizon 2020*

---

208 Diamond and Schell, "Chinese Influence and American Interests," p. 51; Human Rights Watch, "China: Government Threats".

209 U.S. House of Representatives, "U.S. Responses," p. 46.

210 Ibid.

211 Ertin, "The democratic potential," p. 3.

scheme, including the Future of EU-Turkey Relations (FEUTURE) project,<sup>212</sup> or through Erasmus+ schemes such as VIADUCT<sup>213</sup>. However, many donors only provide short-term funds on a project basis while it is actually the more long-term and flexible funding commitments that would help CSOs in non-democracies adapt to and cope with the volatility of corrupted legal systems and repression.<sup>214</sup>

On a broader scale, organizations should seek out diverse partners to support and enhance their voices and work.

**64. Expand engagement with like-minded partners that contest the status quo and confront strategic narratives of their non-democratic governments.**

Just as engagement with organizations that are close to or even associated with non-democratic governments provides legitimacy for the institutional networks of autocracies, engagement with alternative actors that work against such narratives provides them with legitimacy.

**65. Promote independent country and regional expertise** by establishing new and supporting existing research centers on non-democracies.<sup>215</sup> Not only will this ensure adequate regional expertise in the future, but such centers could also serve as safe havens for scholars from non-democratic contexts who are at risk.

**66. Maintain established channels and exercise caution when establishing new ones if the situation on the ground deteriorates.** Long-standing cooperation channels should be maintained and kept alive even when the situation in a non-democratic country deteriorates, as was the case in Turkey. These networks already come with a history and strong interpersonal relationships make it easier to strike the right balance between amicable and constructive cooperation on the one hand and maintaining one's integrity by clearly speaking up and pushing back against repression and authoritarian practices on the other hand. At the same time, rapidly deteriorating political situations and especially a rise in infringements of human rights and fundamental freedoms warrant special caution when it comes to engaging in any new cooperation projects.<sup>216</sup>

## Share and Disseminate Knowledge

Any of the recommendations outlined so far will be more effective if they are implemented at scale. Putting values at the center of cooperation projects requires that organizations better streamline their efforts, cooperate and collectively reframe what

212 See project page on CORDIS, accessed November 15, 2019, <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/rcn/200024/fact-sheet/en>.

213 See project page on Cologne University website, accessed November 15, 2019, <https://www.viaduct.uni-koeln.de/>.

214 Civil Rights Defenders, "Never Give Up," p. 20.

215 In Germany, examples are MERICS on China and CATS on Turkey (both funded by the Stiftung Mercator), but we need much more to ensure the necessary academic and intellectual diversity.

216 Mukherjee, interview, February 12, 2020.

the research and dialogue communities classify as ‘good’ cooperation. Organizations that are interested in raising the standards for cooperation with non-democracies should therefore support and engage in efforts to share their knowledge and collaborate with like-minded institutions – in democracies as well as non-democratic contexts.

67. **Establish and/or strengthen multilateral and international platforms for dialogue and exchange** through financial and/or political support. These institutions facilitate the development of new cooperation regimes, but they can also set norms by establishing codes of conduct, treaties, memoranda of understanding, and other contractual formats that eventually shape what constitutes good practice in the respective realms of collaboration. In addition, they facilitate knowledge sharing and dissemination activities.<sup>217</sup> These platforms should include (semi-)permanent formats that allow (non-)governmental security experts, university leaders and other stakeholders affected by the risks of cooperation to come together to exchange experiences.<sup>218</sup>
68. **Share, standardize, codify, and disseminate best practices.**<sup>219</sup> Different countries, business sectors and research institutes should engage in frequent discussions and share information as well as experiences.<sup>220</sup> Moreover, they should jointly raise awareness about non-democratic practices such as disinformation campaigns.<sup>221</sup>
69. **Make guidelines, best practices and results of internal reflection processes publicly available.** Internal resources that are only circulated in the respective organizational circles may be a first step, but they do not enable public oversight of the organizations in question, nor do they allow for scrutiny of the extent to which organizations have learned from previous misjudgments. Not only is public access to information a way to showcase integrity by demonstrating openness to public scrutiny, but it promotes the overall endeavor to aggregate best practices.
70. **Collect information on fundamental rights infringements** that occurred in cooperation projects with entities from non-democracies. Such incidents should be documented meticulously.
71. **Create, support and/or participate in permanent exchange fora** where organizations involved in cooperation activities can share and discuss experiences. This could, for example, include experiences with authoritarian influence tactics and propaganda activities.<sup>222</sup>

---

217 Paul Marschall and Wulf Reiners, “Coronavirus as an opportunity for international cooperation,” Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik, March 23, 2020, accessed October 19, 2020, <https://www.die-gdi.de/en/the-current-column/article/coronavirus-as-an-opportunity-for-international-cooperation/>.

218 Joske, “Picking Flowers,” p. 19.

219 Ibid, p. 18; Segal and Gerstel, “Research Collaboration,” p. 21; Department of Education, “Guidelines to counter the foreign interference,” p. 22.

220 Joske, “Picking Flowers,” p. 18. Human Rights Watch, “China: Government Threats”.

221 European Parliament, *European Parliament resolution of 23 November 2016*.

222 U.S. House of Representatives, “U.S. Responses,” p. 20.

72. **Establish, support and/or use incident trackers** that document problems or challenges encountered by organizations from liberal democracies when cooperating with counterparts from non-democracies.<sup>223</sup> Such incident trackers would provide shared, collectively maintained data bases that would make it easier for organizations to strategize for and mitigate the potential risks involved in cooperation with non-democracies. Specific types of incidents captured by incident tracks could, for instance, be efforts by partners to conceal military affiliations<sup>224</sup> or visa harassment, to name just two.<sup>225</sup> Such incident trackers should be complemented by corresponding reports that would be published at least on an annual basis.<sup>226</sup> Especially organizations involved in dialogue programs should enhance their efforts to document, systematically assess and publicize risks and incidents as research in this area is currently almost completely lacking.
73. **Create and maintain a list that documents entities from non-democracies with which collaboration is not advisable** due to their continued involvement in fundamental rights infringements.<sup>227</sup>

Ensuring easy access to necessary resources – also and especially for smaller research outfits and universities – is crucial. In Germany, for example, the DAAD offers a variety of free resources, such as country profiles, in-depth analyses of different education systems, and cooperation guidelines to aid research institutes and universities that seek to enter into cooperation agreements.<sup>228</sup>

74. **Establish a central point of contact to channel and direct requests for assistance and expertise** on cooperating with partners in non-democracies. This central point of contact would facilitate information sharing between government agencies, NGOs, research institutes, and foundations. On the one hand, this will help the bigger institutions build up the necessary in-house capacities for tackling the risks associated with cooperation activities. The smaller ones, on the other hand, can rely on the pooled expertise in case their own capacities are not enough. In addition, such a hub could maintain up-to-date incident databases of regional and country experts, and connect organizations that aim to cooperate with non-democracies in similar fields to share their strategies and experiences. Ideally, such a central point of contact could also draw on relevant information from intelligence agencies where necessary.<sup>229</sup>

---

223 Diamond and Schell, “Chinese Influence and American Interests,” p. 77.

224 See, as an example, Chinese Defence University Tracker, accessed January 9, 2020, from <https://unitracker.aspi.org.au/>.

225 European Parliament, *European Parliament resolution of 12 September 2018*.

226 Human Rights Watch, “China: Government Threats”.

227 Joske, “Picking Flowers,” p. 19.

228 DAAD, “DAAD-Kompetenzzentrum Internationale Wissenschaftskooperationen,” accessed October 19, 2020, <https://www.daad.de/de/infos-services-fuer-hochschulen/kompetenzzentrum/>.

229 JASON, “Fundamental Research Security,” p. 4.

# Outlook

In 2012, an article in the *Scientific American* concluded: “If polio is ever completely eradicated from the globe—as seems more and more possible—the world will have the little-known and improbable collaboration between Albert Sabin and Mikhail Chumakov to thank for it.”<sup>230</sup> Less than ten years later, in August 2020, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres proudly announced a crucial victory on the way toward this goal: polio has been eradicated from Africa.<sup>231</sup> There was little discussion of the improbable cooperation between a US and a Soviet scientist that in 1959 and through a mass trial in the Soviet Union delivered proof of the effectiveness of a polio vaccine and thereby paved the way for this success.

Sabin and Chumakov had first met in 1956 during a visit of Russian scientists to the US. The trip was “shadowed by cold war bugbears: the Russians were required, for instance, to cross the country by rail rather than, more conveniently, by air, and the Americans were convinced that at least one ‘doctor’ accompanying the visitors was a KGB operative.”<sup>232</sup> During that visit, “Chumakov and Sabin hit it off, establishing the ties that would lead to a spectacularly productive relationship.” Both Sabin and Chumakov took risks in order to make their cooperation work at the height of the Cold War. Research cooperation and exchange between democracies and non-democracies is risky business. But as this Cold War example shows, it can have huge rewards – if done right.

As UN Secretary-General Guterres announced the eradication of polio from Africa this August, the world was consumed with the coronavirus crisis. On this specific pandemic, there has hardly been any official cooperation between the world’s two most powerful countries, the US and China. But at the level of scientists, the picture looks different. The *Wall Street Journal* reported that “hundreds of doctors and scientists in the U.S. and China have been using online platforms to hold virtual meetings, trading notes on how best to treat patients and procure needed supplies.”<sup>233</sup> One can easily imagine the global benefits of both governments encouraging scientific cooperation based on academic freedom and open sharing of data. But this is not what reality looks like. The behavior of both governments offers a near perfect illustration of some of the risks highlighted in this report: US President Donald Trump and some of his administration’s officials are using language that can only be described as stoking Sinophobia and racism. All the while, they engage in a kind of vaccine nationalism that

---

230 William Swanson, “The Birth of a Cold War Vaccine,” *Scientific American* 306 (4), April 2012, accessed October 21, 2020, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26014328?seq=1>, p. 69.

231 “‘Momentous milestone’ as Africa eradicates wild poliovirus,” *UN News*, August 25, 2020, accessed October 21, 2020, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/08/1071022>.

232 Swanson, p. 68.

233 Jonathan Cheng, “As U.S., China Clash Over Coronavirus, Their Doctors Quietly Join Forces,” *The Wall Street Journal*, April 10, 2020, accessed October 16, 2020, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/as-u-s-china-clash-over-coronavirus-their-doctors-quietly-join-forces-11586516401>.

shows little regard for the rest of the world. On the Chinese side, the coronavirus crisis perfectly illustrates the concerns regarding lack of freedom of speech and transparency we outlined: not only did local Chinese officials suppress doctors who spoke out on the new virus but also punished them publicly by announcing their “misdeeds” on state TV. The Chinese government also engaged in a global disinformation campaign regarding the origins of the virus, with Chinese officials trying to link it to the US military. And reports indicate cases of Chinese and Russian espionage to steal information on other countries’ efforts to develop a vaccine against COVID-19.<sup>234</sup> In addition, there has been a lack of international access to Wuhan for foreign researchers to investigate the origins of the pandemic. All the while, Harvard University announced in February 2020 that its Harvard Medical School as well as the Harvard School of Public Health will cooperate with the Guangzhou Institute of Respiratory Disease on a \$115 million, five-year research project to develop therapies for COVID-19.<sup>235</sup> This effort will be fully funded by the Evergrande Group, China’s largest real estate group. It is remarkable that Harvard has decided to accept funding from a highly leveraged conglomerate that depends on the Chinese party-state for its very survival.<sup>236</sup>

The coronavirus crisis also echoes the French experience of cooperating with Beijing: an agreement signed between the two countries at the heads of state level to help build the Wuhan Institute of Virology, the first P4 (biosafety level 4) laboratory in China, is an example of one-way-street cooperation and technology transfer without the expected reciprocity. In the words of a French news media report: “French experts and researchers have no say in the running of the top-level biosafety laboratory at the Wuhan Institute of Virology in China despite the fact that France helped build the facility and that Paris and Beijing signed an agreement on future cooperation and collaboration.”<sup>237</sup>

All these stories reflect some of the larger and crucial differences between democracies and non-democracies. For the case of China, German Chancellor Angela Merkel argued in May 2020 that “fundamental” differences “should not be an argument against exchange, dialogue and cooperation (...). Rather, open critical-constructive dialogue is ever more important to assert our European values and interests.”<sup>238</sup> The German chancellor is right: research cooperation, dialogue and exchange with non-democracies such as China should continue – if it is indeed clear that such activities

234 Julian E. Barnes and Michael Venutolo-Mantovani, “Race for Coronavirus Pits Spy Against Spy,” *The New York Times*, September 5, 2020, accessed October 20, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/05/us/politics/coronavirus-vaccine-espionage.html>.

235 Ekaterian Pesheva, “Scientists from Harvard, China to unite against coronavirus,” *Harvard Gazette*, February 24, 2020, accessed October 20, 2020, <https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2020/02/harvard-and-china-collaborate-on-coronavirus-therapies/>.

236 Thomas Hale and Hudson Lockett, “Evergrande: the property group that has the market on edge,” *Financial Times*, September 30, 2020, accessed October 20, 2020, <https://www.ft.com/content/839f6efe-5902-4e0f-845c-a862ee58782b>.

237 Karl Laske and Jacques Massey, “The strange saga of how France helped build Wuhan’s top-security virus lab,” *Mediapart*, May 31, 2020, accessed October 20, 2020, <https://www.mediapart.fr/en/journal/france/310520/strange-saga-how-france-helped-build-wuhans-top-security-virus-lab>.

238 Angela Merkel, “Rede von Bundeskanzlerin Merkel im Rahmen der Veranstaltung „Außen- und Sicherheitspolitik in der deutschen EU-Ratspräsidentschaft“ der Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung am 27. Mai 2020,” Die Bundeskanzlerin, May 28, 2020, accessed October 21, 2020, <https://www.bundeskanzlerin.de/bkin-de/aktuelles/rede-von-bundeskanzlerin-merkel-im-rahmen-der-veranstaltung-aussen-und-sicherheitspolitik-in-der-deutschen-eu-ratspraesidentschaft-der-konrad-adenauer-stiftung-am-27-mai-2020-1755884>.



serve to assert European (and one should add: universal) values and interests. We need to work harder to make sure this is really the case. That means better managing risks and not shying away from terminating projects where core values are threatened or risks cannot be managed.

There are a number of steps that governments, universities, think tanks, and CSOs in open societies can take toward improving research cooperation and exchange with non-democracies.

First of all, we need to enhance our evidence base to be able to make better decisions on whether research cooperation and dialogue are really worth pursuing. Especially when it comes to dialogue activities, there is a dire need for better evidence on when and how such formats can be helpful in achieving the stated goals. There is very little research on what works in dialogue programs with non-democracies; however, governments and foundations give significant funding to organizations running dialogue projects. They should also invest more into efforts to evaluate these programs and distill best and worst practices, and support peer exchange among dialogue practitioners. All too often, we rely on simple claims about the effectiveness of dialogue activities, for example in the field of so-called science diplomacy. In 2016, the European External Action Service claimed: “Science cooperation is a fantastic way to developing [sic] links of all kinds (human, political, business oriented...), and maintaining them when other kinds of direct relations are difficult (cf. Iran). Scientific exchanges create opportunities to raise awareness among the scientific community in third countries on EU values, visions and priorities.”<sup>239</sup> This statement contains a host of bold claims about the potential and positive effects of science diplomacy with non-democracies such as Iran (where the government takes researchers from democracies as hostages to further its own political agenda). There is too little effort and investment in subjecting these claims to robust tests in the real world.

Second, better cooperation with non-democracies requires that organizations in democracies stand up for key values in research cooperation and dialogue, most of all academic freedom and freedom of speech. They should also show concrete solidarity with all those in non-democratic countries whose freedoms are under attack. It is good that many European research institutions and governments recently renewed their commitment to academic freedom in international cooperation. In 2019, the Alliance of Science Organizations in Germany published a ten-point declaration in support of academic freedom around world when it marked the 75th anniversary of German basic law.<sup>240</sup> In October 2020, as part of the German EU presidency, German Minister of Education and Research Anja Karliczek invited her peers from other EU member states to sign the *Bonn Declaration on the Freedom of Scientific Research*.<sup>241</sup> The declaration sends a powerful message: “We encourage our research organizations and their researchers to establish strong research cooperation around the world and to uphold

---

239 European External Action Service, “Science Diplomacy,” June 15, 2016, accessed October 20, 2020, [https://eeas.europa.eu/topics/science-diplomacy/410/science-diplomacy\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/topics/science-diplomacy/410/science-diplomacy_en).

240 Allianz der Wissenschaftsorganisationen, “Zehn Thesen zur Wissenschaftsfreiheit,” accessed October 21, 2020, <https://wissenschaftsfreiheit.de/abschlussmemorandum-der-kampagne/>.

241 Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung, *Bonn Declaration on the Freedom of Scientific Research*, October 20, 2020, accessed on October 21, 2020, [https://www.bmbf.de/files/10\\_2\\_2\\_Bonn\\_Declaration\\_en\\_final.pdf](https://www.bmbf.de/files/10_2_2_Bonn_Declaration_en_final.pdf).

and promote the freedom of scientific research when working with researchers from all countries, including those that do not always share our values and principles. We will provide full support to our research organizations in this endeavor and encourage them to promote and anchor the principle of academic freedom in their international relationships.”<sup>242</sup> Karliczek also stressed that “defending and protecting the freedom of science and research lays the foundation for a bright European future.”<sup>243</sup>

If Europe wants to be credible in this pursuit of academic freedom, European leaders need to start at home by standing up for academic freedom within the European Union. It was highly detrimental that German Chancellor Angela Merkel – speaking at a joint press conference with Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán in August 2019 in Sopron – promised that Germany and Hungary would jointly develop a “more visible science and research agenda” without making any reference to Orbán’s crackdown on the independence of academic institutions in Hungary.<sup>244</sup> This came just weeks after the heads of all major German research institutions that are part of the Alliance for Science Organizations had published an open letter in which they appealed to Orbán to rethink his plans for restructuring the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.<sup>245</sup> Merkel’s free pass to Orbán sent a fatal signal: despite the openly voiced concerns of leading science organizations in her own country, the German chancellor does not stand up for academic freedom.

Similarly, it is important that think tank and CSO representatives speak up when academic freedom, freedom of speech and other fundamental freedoms and rights are under assault – especially when they are invited to conferences in non-democracies. For example, think tank representatives should currently not accept invitations to high-profile events organized by Chinese institutions unless they can commit to speaking out on Beijing’s coercive hostage diplomacy and other aspects of repression by the Chinese party-state.

At the same time, organizations involved in cooperation with non-democracies need to push back against those in our societies who target individuals based on their ethnicity or passport and thus create an environment of fear and hesitation to speak out. Yangyang Cheng, a Chinese-born physicist who received her PhD in the US and has become one of the country’s most thoughtful public intellectuals, had this to say about the Trump years:

“Ever since the president took office in 2017, I have lived with a creeping fear that, as a Chinese person in the U.S., I might be sent to an internment camp (...). When there’s nowhere to live freely for a Chinese person like myself, it is rather an indictment on the state of the world than a discount of my humanity.”<sup>246</sup>

---

242 Ibid.

243 Ibid.

244 “Pressekonferenz von Bundeskanzlerin Merkel und dem Ministerpräsidenten der Republik Ungarn, Viktor Orbán,” August 19, 2019, accessed October 21, 2020, <https://www.bundeskanzlerin.de/bkin-de/aktuelles/pressekonferenz-von-bundeskanzlerin-merkel-und-dem-ministerpraesidenten-der-republik-ungarn-viktor-orb%C3%A1n-1661858>.

245 Hans-Christian Pape et al., “Sachlich falsch,” *ZEIT ONLINE*, July 3, 2019, accessed October 21, 2020, <https://www.zeit.de/2019/28/ungarn-forschungsfreiheit-wissenschaft-offener-brief-viktor-orban>.

246 Yangyang Chen, “What now?,” *ChinaFile*, August 5, 2020, accessed October 20, 2020, <https://www.chinafile.com/conversation/what-now>.

This is a profoundly saddening and alarming statement. Yangyang Cheng is very much on point when she calls out those “waving the banner of liberal democracy as a cover for nationalism.” Those who want to stand for liberal democracy and universal values need to stand up to those who are responsible for the fear that Cheng and many others are experiencing.

Finally, we need to change organizational cultures and incentive structures to empower those in government, research organizations, universities, foundations, think tanks, and CSOs who work to defend key values or warn against crossing red lines that should not be crossed when cooperating with non-democracies. Fortunately, individuals across many institutions have been pushing hard to improve how their organizations and peers deal with risks in cooperation with non-democracies. We need to make sure that the rules, incentives and cultures we have in place reward those who stand up for core values and principles – and not those who are unwilling to take these seriously. Evidence suggests that we have quite a bit of work to do on this front. Take the example of Klaus Mühlhahn, former vice president of the Free University Berlin: during his tenure, Mühlhahn was responsible for getting Hanban to fund a professorship at the university, making a mockery of the university’s founding creed. After the details of this became public, Zeppelin University in Southern Germany still hired him as president. Mühlhahn’s case illustrates a broader problem at universities in liberal democracies. Christopher Hughes, a professor and China expert at the London School of Economics (LSE), rightly decries the rise of the “(...) ‘enterprise university’, in which decision-making is increasingly centralized at the expense of governance procedures that were put in place to preserve the values at the heart of the classical model, in order to meet targets set by governments and achieve status in league tables.”<sup>247</sup>

Hughes succinctly summarizes the broader issues illustrated by his university’s pursuit of funds from non-democratic sources:

“My experience is that you can have all kinds of things on paper, but unless academics are empowered to safeguard the values of the university, despite having these procedures in place, no one actually uses them in the way they should.

There is every incentive to marginalise academics and especially the academics who have the expertise. I refer you again to the Woolf report on the Gaddafi incident and what happened to my colleague Professor Fred Halliday, an expert on the Middle East, and how he was marginalised, treated and discredited by the university for trying to point out what was blindingly obvious about taking money from the Gaddafi Foundation. Having procedures in place is one thing, but the culture of the university, the ownership of it, which should be in the hands of the academic faculty, is what I am concerned about. Who owns the university? Who owns its agenda?”<sup>248</sup>

---

247 Christopher Hughes, “Confucius Institutes and the University,” *Issues & Studies* 50 (4), 2014, accessed October 20, 2020, <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/35434291.pdf>, pp. 49-50.

248 Christopher Hughes, “Testimony at Foreign Affairs Committee,” September 3, 2019, accessed October 20, 2020, <http://data.parliament.uk/WrittenEvidence/CommitteeEvidence.svc/EvidenceDocument/Foreign-Affairs/Autocracies-and-UK-Foreign-Policy/Oral/105583.html>.

Judging from how the institution has been courting Shanghai venture capitalist and CCP mouthpiece Eric Li for funding of a new China program, LSE seems to have learned very little from the Gaddafi experience.<sup>249</sup>

We clearly need a rethink on authoritarian funding of universities and think tanks in liberal democracies. There should be more public pressure to get universities, think tanks and other research institutions to commit to a “democracy pledge,” which should involve a commitment not to seek or accept funding from authoritarian sources (including companies or foundations linked to non-democratic governments).<sup>250</sup> At GPPi, we distilled this into one simple credo: *We do not accept funding from any actor or entity that is anti-democratic or beholden to anti-democratic actors.*

Given the dangers of both co-branding with and depending on funding from authoritarian sources, this seems like an obvious rule to adopt for universities and think tanks that are committed to open societies. Yet too many institutions, including some of the world’s leading universities and think tanks, still accept funding from non-democratic sources. Governments and funders of think tanks need to make sure to set the right incentives. Governments in the Anglo-Saxon world in particular, which have many private universities and have cut down on taxpayer funding for universities in recent decades, need to re-commit to public funding for universities. And all democratic governments should make public funding for universities contingent on a commitment not to accept funding from non-democratic sources. If private universities such as Harvard then decide to continue relying on Saudi and Chinese funding, they should be asked to forego research funding from public sources. The same should hold for think tanks and other research institutions. If all foundations that are committed to democracy and open societies decided against funding think tanks that accept authoritarian money, this would significantly alter the incentives for those in think tanks who are in leadership positions. Once they reject funding from non-democracies, universities, research institutes, think tanks, and CSOs in democracies will not only enjoy greater credibility but also have the independence that is necessary to engage in research cooperation and exchange projects with non-democracies on their own terms.

How to engage with non-democracies in research cooperation and exchange is a discussion democratic societies should also have in their parliaments as well as in the broader public sphere. After the end of the Cold War, actors from democracies pursued their research cooperation and exchange activities with non-democracies with a self-confidence that was paired with illusions and carelessness about the inevitable risks. Now, not only do we have to shed many of these illusions and become more aware of the risks, but we also seem to have lost some of the self-confidence along the way. Investing in democracies’ long-term ability to innovate and act on their key values and principles can reverse that trend. Self-confidence that is paired with risk-awareness will serve as a useful compass for navigating research cooperation and exchange with non-democracies.

---

249 Primrose Riordan, “London School of Economics academics outraged by proposed China program,” *Financial Times*, October 27, 2019, accessed October 20, 2020, <https://www.ft.com/content/2dd5ed50-f538-11e9-a79c-bc9acae3b654>.

250 Thorsten Benner, “It’s Time for Think Tanks and Universities to Take the Democracy Pledge,” *The Washington Post*, January 16, 2019, accessed October 19, 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2019/01/16/its-time-think-tanks-universities-take-democracy-pledge/>.

**Global Public Policy Institute (GPPi)**

Reinhardtstr. 7, 10117 Berlin, Germany

Phone +49 30 275 959 75-0

Fax +49 30 275 959 75-99

[gppi@gppi.net](mailto:gppi@gppi.net)

[gppi.net](http://gppi.net)