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Poland–China Relations: From Enthusiasm to Caution? A Polish Perspective

Abstract

Since 2008, Poland has been reinvigorating relations with China. The reasons behind were two-fold. The global economic crisis, which affected the EU, was an impulse for Poland to look for economic partners beyond Europe. While China's global ascendancy means that not having intensive relations with the PRC may marginalise Poland in the EU and globally. In recent years, one may observe an intensification of bilateral ties. Currently, political relations are well institutionalised, and in 2016, they were named a “comprehensive strategic partnership”. However, despite this political hype, especially between 2011–2017, economic cooperation is not a success – trade deficit on the Polish side is expanding and the Chinese investment offer is not attractive. What is more, China's global assertive approach, such as take-overs of high-tech companies and loan-based investments that may increase public debt and give an access to strategic assets made Poland rethink its policy towards China. Since 2017, Poland voices its discontent about trade deficit, scarce 16 + 1 results, China–Russia cooperation, etc. It is argued that strategic partnership has not met Poland's expectations yet.

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Introduction

In 1989, when Poland's political and economic transformation was launched, Sino–Polish ties were proper but not intensive. Poland's foreign policy priorities were one of the reasons, in which the PRC played a marginal role. At that time, Poland focused on ties with new neighbours that appeared after the Soviet Union's collapse, the unification of Germany and dissolution of Czechoslovakia. What is more, at that time Poland defined its two diplomatic priorities: memberships in NATO and the EU. Under these circumstances, there were not enough political and economic capabilities to focus on such remote regions as Asia, including China. Additionally, the symbolic coincidence of events that happened in both Poland and China on 4 June 1989 – in Poland the first semi-free elections, but in Beijing the crackdown of students' demonstrations in the Tiananmen Square – did not bring the two countries closer to each other.²

The situation changed a little bit after Poland's accession to the EU in 2004. In June 2004, the PRC's Chairman, Hu Jintao, visited Poland and bilateral ties were upgraded to the “friendly cooperation partnership” level.³ Nevertheless, the first years after Poland's accession to the EU could not be assessed as a success in terms of China–Poland relations. At that time, Poland was not very active in promoting enhancement of bilateral cooperation, political contacts were not frequent, and Poland did not actively use the EU forums when it came to the issues related to cooperation with China. At the same time, the PRC was still concentrated politically and economically on the “old” EU member states. The situation changed noticeably in 2008, when the global financial crisis broke out. Since then, the Polish policy towards China is more active, including intensive political dialogue, the process of bilateral ties institutionalisation and various efforts to improve economic cooperation. This very process is visible for the last ten years.

² SZCZUDLIK-TATAR 2013, 25–26.

³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC 2004.

The aim of this paper is to present the Poland–China ties, its developments and the state of play from Poland’s perspective. In that sense, it is more an analysis of Poland’s policy towards China than that of Sino–Polish relations. It embraces the 2008–2018 period: from the redefinition of Poland’s policy towards China until mid-2018. The paper is divided into two main parts. The first refers to the 2008–2016 period, which might be summarised as Poland’s enthusiasm about relations with China. While the second, which started in early 2017, could be defined as a more cautious approach towards China. In that sense, these two divisions – 2008–2016 and 2017–until now – do not go in line with the government change in Poland. A new government was established after the presidential and parliamentary elections in 2015 (after eight years in power, the liberal and centrist Civic Platform party lost the elections). The Law and Justice conservative opposition party won both elections, secured an absolute majority and established a non-coalition government. In its first year of existence, it continued a policy towards China of its predecessors. The change of approach is noticeable since early 2017. The paper focuses on Poland’s reasons for greater interest in China, goals and tools for achieving them as well as rationales and manifestation of the recent change in bilateral ties.

China as a prospective partner: Towards “Comprehensive Strategic Partnership” (2008–2016)

China as an economic and political partner

A significant shift in the Polish policy towards China was launched in late 2008. The symbol of Poland’s greater attention to China and the beginning of the reinvigoration of bilateral ties was Prime Minister Donald Tusk’s visit to the PRC in October 2008. It was the first ever visit of a Polish PM to China since 1994. Tusk focused on economic cooperation and was muted on sensitive issues such as human rights.

There were several reasons for this shift. After becoming NATO and EU members, it was time to set up new diplomatic goals and priorities. This process was accelerated by the global crisis with two main implications for Poland. The government realised that Poland’s economy is overdependent on the European (mostly EU’s) market – more than 80% of trade and

investments are done in Europe. This overdependence might have a negative impact on Poland in case of EU troubles. In that sense, Poland started to look for diversification of economic partners, especially new outlet markets for exports. What is more, the Polish Government was aware of the upcoming gradual decrease of structural EU funds and in that sense started to seek new sources of capital. Asia, including China, which coped quite well with the crisis, still recording impressive economic growth and an expanding middle class was perceived as a possible new direction of Polish foreign economic policy.

The second factor that convinced the Polish Government to intensify relations with China had a political nature. China's stable position despite the crisis, the global economic and political ascendance of the PRC was an evidence of China's rising position in the world. In that sense, having not intensive but only proper relations with the PRC is not enough and may lead to a situation that Poland would be perceived as a marginal state, at least at the EU level. In that sense, Poland started to perceive China not only as an economic but also political partner as well as a rising global power with which intensive ties are indispensable to be seen as a country with a solid position in the EU and globally. What is more, it was argued that after years of Poland's preoccupation in Europe and underestimating China as a political and economic partner we should catch up. It was argued that big "old" EU members such as Germany and France are already present in China and Poland should not leave itself behind.

A good example of this aforementioned mindset was presented in the document about Poland's foreign policy priorities (2012–2016). It was said that "the role of emerging markets is growing and China – which became the world's second largest economy and exporter – gradually outclasses the U.S. and Europe as far as investments are concerned. The PRC already competes in services and goods with the Western world, while in innovation rankings is getting closer to the EU and the development gap between China and the West is gradually decreasing".⁴ While in 2015, Minister of Foreign Affairs Grzegorz Schetyna said that the centre of the world's dynamics is shifting to the Pacific and the role of China as a global power is rising. In that sense Poland is facing a huge challenge – it will become a country capable of taking an important place in cooperation between Europe and other continents or will be doomed to limit its

⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland 2012, 3.

activities to its own region, and in further perspective will be marginalised. Asia currently contributes one-third of the global GDP. Despite the fact that the European middle class is still the largest source of demand on the global market, in 2030, the demand generated by the middle class of the Asia–Pacific region will be almost three times higher than the European. Poland must be ready for these global trends.⁵

Poland's goals

This mindset led to a formulation of goals in Poland's policy towards China. The priority is economic cooperation, mainly expanding exports as Poland records a huge trade deficit with China. The second aim is to attract Chinese investment as a new source of capital but also know-how. In that sense, Poland is interested mainly in greenfield and brownfield FDIs as they create jobs and facilitate technology transfers. The third goal is to expand Polish investment to China.

While the political goal is to maintain a regular and intensive political dialogue both on central and local as well as high and lower levels. This goal has two dimensions. The first one is connected with Poland's aim to be perceived in the EU (and globally) as an important player – a country which has a capability and ability to actively shape its relations with global powers such as China. The second dimension is linked with the aforementioned economic goals. Intensive political dialogue with China is perceived as an umbrella or a facilitator for closer economic ties. It is argued that good political relations are signals for Chinese business and local authorities that Poland is a partner worth cooperating with.

Apart from economic and political goals, the sub-goals were established as well. They might be perceived as auxiliary and long-term related goals. The promotion of Polish culture and language to disseminate knowledge about Poland in the PRC is one of them. Moreover, Poland would like to attract Chinese tourists and students to come to Poland. Those goals had two dimensions as well – to create “consciousness” about Poland in China, but also to get some economic gains due to the rising Chinese middle class, which has money and more frequently travels abroad as tourists and students. When there is a demographic decline of the current

⁵ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland 2015.

generation of students at the Polish universities, more foreign students mean more financial gains. Moreover, more Chinese students and tourists coming to Poland as an attractive destination is also a way to build close people-to-people relations with China, which could also positively influence the economic and political cooperation if not now, then probably in the future.⁶ In that sense those “soft” goals are seen as long-term investments.

Intensive political dialogue

As it was already mentioned, the year of 2008 was a breakthrough in terms of political dialogue between Poland and China. Then Poland started intensive preparation work for Expo 2010 in Shanghai (May–October). This event was perceived as a huge opportunity for a promotional campaign of Poland in China. It was a result of some opinion polls conducted in China with devastating results that generally Chinese people knew nothing about Poland. Eventually, during the Expo, eight million people visited the Polish pavilion, including representatives of the Polish authorities: the Speaker of the Sejm, the Minister of Infrastructure, the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Minister of Culture and National Heritage were some of the guests. Moreover, 40 events promoting Polish economy and 130 events promoting Polish culture were organised in China at the margins of Expo 2010.⁷

The year of 2011 was an important period in Poland–China ties. In June, CPC Standing Committee member, He Guoqiang, visited Poland. He met with President Bronisław Komorowski, handing him an invitation to visit China at the end of the year. In August, China’s Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi paid a visit to Poland and met with Prime Minister Tusk and Foreign Minister Radosław Sikorski. However, the most important event was President Komorowski’s visit to China in December (the first such visit since 1997). It was considered a symbol of the new opening. The President met with Hu Jintao, Prime Minister Wen Jiabao, and the Chairman of the Chinese Parliament Wu Bangguo. The result of the visit was a joint declaration on upgrading relations to “strategic partnership”. The document includes the need to intensify high-level political dialogue, establish

⁶ Znak 2009.

⁷ PAIH 2010.

a new cooperation mechanism at the level of deputy foreign ministers (the so-called strategic dialogue) and support for cooperation at the local level as a new dimension of the relationship.⁸ The declaration was a signal that China recognised Poland as an important partner in this part of Europe.

Intensive political contacts were maintained in 2012. In March, Chinese Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Song Tao paid a visit to Warsaw. He took part in the first meeting of the newly established strategic dialogue. The most important event was in April when Prime Minister Wen Jiabao visited Poland – it was the first visit of the head of the Chinese Government since 1987. In addition to the bilateral, the visit also had a multilateral dimension. In Warsaw, a new formula of cooperation between China and Central Europe (the so-called 16 + 1 format) was established. At the economic forum accompanying the first 16 + 1 summit, Wen Jiabao announced “12 measures for friendly cooperation with Central and Eastern Europe”. This document is twelve short- and medium-term goals set by the Chinese side to strengthen cooperation with the region.

In June 2015, Minister of Foreign Affairs Grzegorz Schetyna paid a visit to China. At that time, the inaugural meeting of the Intergovernmental Committee was held in Beijing. Schetyna met with Foreign Minister Wang Yi and the Vice President of the PRC Li Yuanchao. In October, Wang Yi visited Poland. The most important event of 2015 was the visit of the new Polish President Andrzej Duda to China in November. It took place shortly after the change of government in Poland. The new Polish authorities confirmed their will to continue the policy of strengthening bilateral relations. In addition to bilateral, the visit also had a regional dimension – the president took part at the 4th 16 + 1 summit held in Suzhou. For the first time, Poland was represented at this forum by the head of state. The president highlighted that the 16 + 1 already has its permanent place in Europe–China relations. In addition to Suzhou, where Duda met with Prime Minister Li Keqiang, he also visited Beijing, where he met with Xi Jinping and the Head of the Chinese Parliament Zhang Dejiang. The president assured that the strategic partnership would be continued. He added that choosing China – the only Asian country – in the plans of his first foreign visits is an expression of the importance he attaches to the Sino–Polish relations. The president invited Xi Jinping to visit Poland in 2016.

⁸ Embassy of the PRC 2012.

Before Xi's trip to Warsaw, Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs Witold Waszczykowski paid his first Asian visit to China in April. In Beijing, he met with Minister Wang Yi, Li Yuanchao and Head of the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) Xu Shaoshi. In Chengdu he talked with the party secretary of the Sichuan Province Wang Dongming, visited the Polish consulate in this city (launched in June 2015) and the Qingbaijiang logistics centre, where a transshipment terminal is located, serving a regular Łódź–Chengdu cargo train.

On 19–21 June 2016, Xi Jinping paid an official visit to Poland (the first since 2004, when Hu Jintao visited Warsaw). Xi met with President Duda, speakers of two chambers of parliament and Prime Minister Beata Szydło. The heads of both countries took part in the International Silk Road Forum and the 4th Poland–China Regional Forum. The most important result of the visit was the declaration – signed by Xi and Duda – of elevating bilateral relations to a “comprehensive strategic partnership”. In the Chinese diplomatic nomenclature, this is the highest level of relations with countries that are not treated by China as a superpower. The declaration underlined the convergence of the Silk Road Initiative related to Chinese economic reforms with the Strategy for Responsible Development (the so-called Morawiecki Plan) and announced the strengthening cooperation between the two initiatives, as well as the formulation of a Polish–Chinese cooperation plan.⁹

During the visit, about 30 agreements and letters of intent were signed. The most important were three MoUs of the Ministry of Development and the NDRC: joint formulation of the assumptions of the bilateral cooperation plan; establishing a joint steering committee for industrial cooperation; agreements on the development of communication areas of information. Agreements have also been concluded to facilitate trade, including the increase of Polish exports to the PRC. The Ministry of Agriculture and the Chinese General Administration for Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine (AQSIQ) have signed: a protocol of phytosanitary requirements for the export of apples from Poland to China; agreement on cooperation to control the level of harmful substances in Polish poultry meat and a letter of intent on scientific research and cooperation regarding the principles of regionalisation in relation to African swine fever. Meanwhile, the

⁹ Official site of the President of the Republic of Poland 2016.

Ministry of Economic Development and the PRC Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM) formulated two MoUs in the field of logistics infrastructure and industrial parks.

Institutionalisation

2011–2016 is a period of institutionalisation of Polish–Chinese relations. This term refers to new cooperation mechanisms, which make bilateral dialogue regular. Institutionalisation was carried on two levels: national (Polish), which includes new institutions within the Polish administration; and bilateral, which concerns strictly bilateral mechanisms as the result of the decision between Poland and China.

In December 2012, Prime Minister Tusk established an Inter-Ministerial Team for Coordination of Activities for the Development of a Strategic Partnership between Poland and China. This is the government's advisory body. Its main tasks are: to formulate recommendations in order to deepen bilateral relations, to monitor them, to facilitate a smooth flow of information between state administration agencies, etc. The head of the team is the Deputy Foreign Minister, while its deputy is the Vice Minister of Economy. Members are the Ambassador of Poland in China and representatives of various ministries. The team meets at least twice a year.¹⁰ Until 2018, the team met 11 times. The latest meeting took place in April 2018.

In 2012, the Polish Information and Foreign Investment Agency (PAIiIZ) and the Ministry of Economy launched the “Go China” internet platform.¹¹ Its goal is to collect economic information about China in one place, to assist Polish entrepreneurs launching cooperation with Chinese partners. In the same year, the Centre for Polish–Chinese Cooperation was established in PAIiIZ, the only institution in the Agency devoted entirely to one country. The agency also opened its first foreign office in Shanghai.

New institutions were also established at the Polish Embassy in Beijing. In May 2014, the Polish Institute – a state agency under MFA to promote Polish culture and history abroad – was launched. The Institute was officially opened by Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Artur Nowak-Far.

¹⁰ Monitor Polski 2012.

¹¹ See www.paii.gov.pl/publikacje/gochina.

In the same year, a new position – a counsellor representing the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development – was established in the Polish Embassy in Beijing.

Poland's commitment to the Silk Road Initiative was demonstrated by Prime Minister Szydło's decision on 31 May 2016 to establish a Team to prepare assumptions for cooperation in the field of infrastructure projects for implementation with China. The team is a government's advisory body. Its main goal is to prepare a list of Polish–Chinese projects and their financing schemes, including Poland's contribution. The body is headed by Deputy Minister of Economic Development and the vice-chairman is Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs. Members are vice ministers of finance, energy, treasury, maritime economy and inland waterway transport, infrastructure and construction, agriculture and rural development.¹²

Institutionalisation also took place on a bilateral level. Poland–China Strategic dialogue was established by the declaration of upgrading relations to strategic partnership in late 2011. It refers to annual meetings of deputy foreign ministers of both countries. The first meeting took place in March 2012 in Warsaw and was chaired by Vice Ministers Song Tao and Jerzy Pomianowski. Until the end of 2018, there were five “strategic dialogues”. The last one took place in Beijing in September 2017.

Another bilateral institution is the Polish–Chinese Intergovernmental Committee established in 2012. The meetings are to take place every two years, and the ministers of foreign affairs of both countries are heads of this mechanism. Representatives of other institutions are also invited to the meetings, depending on the topic of the talks. The first meeting of the committee took place in June 2015 in Beijing.

In 2013, during the visit of Minister Tomasz Siemoniak in China, a strategic dialogue was established at the level of defence ministers. The first meeting in this formula took place in November 2014 in Beijing and was chaired by Deputy Ministers Robert Kupiecki and Wang Guanzhong.

Another new bilateral institution is the Poland–China Regional Forum. It is a platform for establishing contacts with local authorities, enterprises, universities and cultural institutions. The aim is to promote relations at the local level. The vast area of China, their large diversity and cultural differences mean that relations at the central level are not enough to achieve the main goals of Polish policy towards China. Local

¹² Monitor Polski 2016.

authorities know better both the needs and the advantages of their “small homelands” as well as local entrepreneurs. In that sense, it is easier for them to identify potential areas of cooperation. Therefore, the local dimension in Polish–Chinese relations is becoming an increasingly important way to implement the goals set by the Polish diplomacy. The first forum was held in April 2013 in Gdańsk, the second in June 2014 in Guangzhou, the third in June 2015 in Łódź, while the fourth in Warsaw in 2016. Cooperation at the local level in the discussed years has clearly intensified. A model example is the cooperation of Łódź city and the Łódź Voivodeship with Chengdu city and Sichuan Province. Both regions have opened their offices in partner cities, and since 2013 there has been a cargo train connection between Łódź and Chengdu. Cooperation at the local level was an impulse for the government to set up a new Polish Consulate General in Chengdu. The consulate was opened in mid-2015.

Economic cooperation

Poland's actions to improve economic relations. The economic goals – a cornerstone of Poland's policy towards China – are strictly connected with a necessity of greater access to the Chinese market. This requires promotion of knowledge about Asian business partners, markets, principles and ways of doing business, as well as potential export products that have a chance to exist on the Chinese market. In 2011–2016, the Polish authorities undertook two-fold actions. The first direction was an attempt to create a friendly political climate as an umbrella for companies in both countries. The other direction was the administrative decisions aimed at facilitating economic contacts between countries.

The first group includes discussing economic issues at all meetings, regardless of the level and format. During the visits of Presidents Bronisław Komorowski and Andrzej Duda, Polish–Chinese economic forums were organised. Such forums are also organised under 16 + 1 formats, and every two years in Ningbo in June there are meetings of representatives of ministries responsible for economic matters, on which Polish representatives were present. Polish authorities during meetings with Chinese representatives raised the issue of the huge trade deficit on the Polish side, barriers to Chinese market (e.g. difficulties in obtaining certificates for agricultural products or Chinese embargo on Polish pork),

and the issue of guarantees that the Chinese bank should repay after the unsuccessful Covec investment in Poland. They also encourage Chinese entrepreneurs to invest in Poland, paying attention to its competitive advantages.¹³

As far as decisions are concerned, two 16 + 1 mechanisms of an economic nature were established in Poland. In November 2014, PAIiIZ launched a cooperation mechanism for investment agencies, while in December 2014, at the 16 + 1 summit, a Business Council was established with its secretariat in the Polish Agency for Enterprise Development. While in late 2016 and early 2017 a new 16 + 1 mechanism – the secretariat for maritime cooperation was set up in Poland, as a result of the Riga summit in November 2016. In March 2015, Poland submitted an application to the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) in order to obtain the status of a founding member. On 9 October 2015, the Polish Ambassador to Beijing Mirosław Gajewski signed an agreement on the creation of AIIB.¹⁴

Silk Road. Since the announcement, Poland expresses a positive attitude towards the Silk Road Initiative. This initiative is perceived as a means that may help in expanding Polish exports to China, attract Chinese investments, and speed up Poland's reindustrialisation through synergies between the OBOR and Poland's Morawiecki Plan – e.g. upgrading Polish infrastructure. Nevertheless, no specific project has so far been launched since the announcement of the initiative (known also as “One Belt, One Road” – OBOR or “Belt and Road Initiative” – BRI). To date, China has rather recast existing projects under the Silk Road name, with a prime example being the Łódź–Chengdu cargo train line.¹⁵ In 2015, Poland signed a Silk Road MoU, while during Xi Jinping's visit to Poland, the BRI was reshaped into the above-mentioned declaration of “comprehensive strategic partnership”.

In 2016, Poland continued its involvement in the initiative of the Silk Road. In March, the parliament unanimously agreed to the ratification by the President of the agreement on Poland's accession to the AIIB.¹⁶ On 19 April 2016, the President signed a law that entered into force on May

¹³ GRADZIUŁ-SZCZUDLIK-TATAR 2012; Chancellery of the President of the Republic of Poland 2012, 12, 13, 19, 23; Official site of the President of the Republic of Poland 2015.

¹⁴ Ministry of Finance 2015.

¹⁵ See SZCZUDLIK 2016, 45–48.

¹⁶ Sejm 2016.

6. Poland became a full member of AIIB on June 15, when the process of its creation was completed at the meeting of the bank's governors.

In April 2016, a railway freight connection from Kutno to Chengdu was launched. The inauguration was attended by the head of the CPC in Sichuan Province, Wang Dongming. In addition to Łódź (which plans to expand the terminal, to more efficiently handle rail transports on this route) and Kutno, cooperation with China is also declared by the Lublin province. The dry port in Małaszewicze is transhipped as part of the Zhengzhou–Hamburg railway connection, which is served by PKP Cargo. Representatives of the province participated in a meeting with the Chinese delegation during the visit of Xi Jinping in Poland. It is also worth mentioning that President Andrzej Duda and Chairman Xi Jinping (during his visit to Poland in June 2016) took part in the inauguration of the “China Railway Express” connection. The first freight train with this logo came to Warsaw from Chengdu with car parts and electronics.

During the visit of Xi Jinping, several agreements were concluded which can be considered as related to the BRI. Apart from changing the BRI (along with the Morawiecki Plan) into the declaration on a comprehensive strategic partnership, cooperation agreements in the areas of logistics infrastructure, industrial parks, development of information communication areas (the so-called information Silk Road) or conditions for using Exim Bank financial support for infrastructure projects were signed in Poland.

Trade. For Poland, the biggest problem in bilateral ties is a huge trade deficit, which is rising. While in 2011 it was at the level of 10:1 – Poland imported 10 times more from China than exported – and amounted to nearly 12 billion euros, in 2015 this ratio increased to 11:1, and the deficit reached the level 18.6 billion euros. While in 2016 and 2017 this ration increased to 12:1 and reached respectively 20 billion euro (2016), and 22 billion (2017).¹⁷

The trade structure is still unsatisfactory. Roughly 40% of Polish exports were made up of unprocessed goods (base metals, chemical products, plastics) that are prone to price changes on global markets. However, in the Polish import from China, the products of the electromechanical industry (54.8%) and textile industry (10%) dominated. Due to the structure of this import, which mostly includes high value-added goods, Poland's goal in relations with China is not to limit imports from, but to expand exports to

¹⁷ Ministry of Enterprise and Technology 2017; Ministry of Enterprise and Technology 2018.

China. One of the reasons for expanding deficit is the embargo on Polish pork that was imposed by China in early 2014 due to cases of ASF in Poland's eastern borders. While at the end of 2016, China imposed sanctions on Polish poultry (after detecting cases of avian influenza) which was lifted at the end of 2017. Another reason was the difficult access to the Chinese market, mainly due to non-tariff barriers. For Poland, a particular problem is the difficulty of obtaining certificates for agricultural products. This issue was even more visible from 2014, when Russia imposed an embargo on agricultural products from EU countries.

The fact that Poland gained access to the Chinese market for fresh apples, due to the protocol signed in June 2016 during the Xi Jinping visit, should be considered a positive phenomenon in trade relations. Fresh apples from Poland were admitted to the Chinese market in November 2016 after all formal procedures were completed. The first transport of apples to China was launched in December 2016 to Chengdu.

Investments. To date, Poland has a small amount of Chinese investments. Nevertheless, recently, especially in 2016, there was a noticeable rise of Chinese FDIs. At the end of 2016, the estimated level of Chinese investment reached around EUR 757.6 million.¹⁸ In terms of sectors, Chinese investments include: electronics, electromechanical sector, machinery, distribution, ICT, energy, environment, infrastructure and banking. The latest biggest and perceived as high-quality investments took place in 2016. They embraced the following investments:

- In mid-2016, Suzhou Chunxing Precision Mechanical, a public company listed on the Shenzhen stock exchange that produces aluminium components for telecom, automotive, medical and other industries opened a prototyping workshop in Gdańsk.
- In 2016, China Hongbo Clean Energy Europe purchased a plot in Opole to build a LED lighting factory. The company intends to invest EUR 85 million and create about 100 jobs. Apart from manufacturing, Hongbo plans to set up an R&D centre as a second phase of investment and a result of company cooperation with the Technical University of Opole.
- In August 2016, China Everbright International, a leading player in China's environmental protection industry and the first one-stop integrated environmental solutions provider in the

¹⁸ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland 2018.

country, completed its acquisition of Novago, a leading solid waste treatment Polish company. The acquisition was approximately EUR 123 million.

- In October 2016, the Portuguese EDPR Group sold 49% of its shares in a wind farm in Poland to a fund controlled by China Three Gorges Corporation. Estimated value of acquired shares in Poland is calculated to EUR 289 million.

It is worth mentioning that in 2012–2015, one of China's unsuccessful investments in Poland was a source of tensions in bilateral ties. In 2009, China Overseas Engineering Group (Covec) won a tender to build a highway in Poland that should have been finished before the football Euro Cup 2012. Covec, which won the tender offering the lowest price, during the process of construction, reported a need for increasing the contract value. Eventually, the Chinese investor abandoned the project. The topic of repayment guarantees by Chinese banks was raised by Poland on each occasion and during all meetings with Chinese officials. Guarantees were eventually repaid in 2015.

China as a Difficult Partner or a Challenge? Towards a more balanced approach (since 2017)

2017 was the second year of the Law and Justice in power. The incumbent government, which in the previous year continued the approach defined and shaped by its predecessors, in 2017 signalled caution towards the PRC. This new attitude was noticeable especially in the economic sphere – trade and investments. There are signals in the public domain – in public speeches and interviews given by government representatives – about some modifications of Poland's approach towards China. What is more, several decisions that were made highlight this change. Moreover, at the end of 2017 and beginning of 2018, government officials more openly admitted that the strategic partnership does not work as the trade deficit is raising and there are no interesting projects that might be implemented together with Chinese partners. Furthermore, 16 + 1 results are almost zero, while this formula “casts a shadow” on bilateral relations, which are becoming less important for China. This part is to give an overview of this evolution.

Officially, the goals of Poland's policy towards China have not been changed. This was confirmed by the exposés of the Minister of Foreign Affairs delivered in early 2017 and 2018.¹⁹ Nevertheless, it is of utmost importance to expand Polish export to China, attract Chinese investments and maintain intensive and regular political dialogue. In 2017, political dialogue was continued and was intensive. In May 2017, Prime Minister Beata Szydło paid an official visit to China and then took part in the first-ever International BRI Forum in Beijing. In July, Zheng Dejiang visited Poland. He met with the Prime Minister, the Speaker of the Parliament and the President. Zhang also attended the Poland–China BRI Forum for Infrastructural Cooperation, where Deputy Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki talked about serious potentials for deepened trade, investment, infrastructure and economic cooperation between the two countries. He also mentioned that in the next ten years, and even in a shorter period, Poland will spend over USD 100 billion on infrastructure investments.²⁰ Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Marek Magierowski took part in the 9th and 10th 16 + 1 National Coordinators meeting in Beijing (July 2017) and in Budapest (October 2017) before the 6th 16 + 1 summit. While Prime Minister Szydło took part in the 6th 16 + 1 summit in Budapest in November 2017. What is more, the Polish mechanism for cooperation with China and bilateral institutions worked according to the plan. In 2017, the 9th and 10th, while in 2018 the 11th meeting of the Inter-Ministerial Team was held in Warsaw. In 2017, the 5th strategic dialogue took place in Beijing in September. However, it is also worth mentioning that in 2017, the planned second Intergovernmental Committee meeting headed by the Polish and Chinese Prime Ministers did not take place, as well as the fifth Poland–China Regional Forum.

In the economic domain, the deficit on the Polish side increased. Concerning investments, 2017 was a little bit worse than 2016. There were examples of Chinese FDI's such as the announcement of Nuchtech of its second investment in Kobyłka near Warsaw – a new manufacturing factory of scanners for air industry and custom services. It is argued that the new plant in Poland will be the fourth largest beyond China, Dubai and Brazil.

¹⁹ See the information of the Minister of Foreign Affairs about the tasks of Polish foreign policy in 2017 and 2018 on www.msz.gov.pl, 9 February 2017 and 21 March 2018.

²⁰ Wizyta Zhang Dejianga w Polsce [Zhang Dejiang's visit to Poland], 13 July 2017, www.paih.gov.pl.

What is more, Smithfield Foods group, owned by the Chinese WH Group, has taken over the meat factories of Pini Polska and Hamburger Pini and the Royal Chicken Company. Furthermore, the Chinese Shanghai Electric Power Construction took part in a public tender for the construction of a garbage incinerator in Warsaw and is considered a potential contractor. As early as 2018, examples of Chinese investments were announced. A value-added greenfield FDI by a Chinese producer of electric car battery components, Guotai-Huarong is also worth mentioning. The company plans to build a factory in Poland. While in June, Zhonglu Fruit Juice took over the Polish producer of concentrated fruit juices – the Appol Company.

It seems that the economic data – the steadily growing trade deficit – as well as examples of Chinese investments in other countries that may pose a risk for a hosting country (investments based on loans which increase public debt and make the host country dependent on China or hostile takeovers such as in Germany) were among the reasons why the Polish Government now is re-thinking or reconsidering bilateral ties assessing five years of strategic partnership. The analysis of decisions and remarks in 2017 and the beginning of 2018 vindicate a change or at least correction of the Polish approach. In early 2017, Polish authorities started to argue that Poland seeks Chinese investments but not as a source of capital (as the previous government argued facing upcoming decrease of EU funds) but as technology and innovative solution providers. It also started to underscore a slogan that capital has nationality and that investments should be based on Polish capital and ownership.

The first signal came in February when the government-controlled agency – the Military Property Agency – cancelled a tender for a land in Łódź where the transshipment hub was to be built. A Polish–Chinese company – with a Chinese co-owner registered in Dubai – was interested in this property. It was argued that the origin of the Chinese company is vague, which was vindicated by its unsuccessful or even shadow investments in Germany. What is more, the Polish side stated that the Agency's decision to announce an unlimited tender was not proper because that would mean that investors may do whatever they want, including taking full control over the investment. The tender was cancelled with an information that Polish capital would probably be involved and a limited tender would be announced in the near future.

The second signal was sent in May during Prime Minister Szydło's trip to Beijing. She went to China with Mikołaj Wild who is a Government

Advisor responsible for the Central Communication Port (or hub) – a current flagship project of the government. When the project was announced, there were expectations that the Chinese company may be interested in it. But Wild said in Beijing that: “We did not go to China for money for the CCP [...]. We are not looking for financing, in return for control over the investment. We are looking for an economic partner who will also be interested in the success of this investment.”²¹ While another government representative said that: “We want investments to be under Polish control – obviously in cooperation with China. We would like to avoid the situation in which projects, such as CCP, are entirely financed by China [...]. Infrastructure investments must be carried out with caution, with the predominance of Polish capital. This applies not only to Chinese capital, but to every other. We believe that capital has nationality. It would be unreasonable at this point to ‘let’ investors enter into the infrastructure projects, giving them all the funding possibilities.”²²

There is also an example of an investment that has not been finalised. Agreed in May 2017, China Security & Fire’s purchase of Polish Konsalnet – the largest security company in Poland – for about EUR 110 million was officially halted in July. Supposedly, the reason is a new Chinese policy of greater control over the flow of capital from the country. However, there are also speculations that due to security reasons (the company had some links with the Chinese Communist Party, while the Polish company Konsalnet is responsible for protecting state agencies) Poland eventually cancelled this investment.²³ While in 2018, three potential Chinese investments in Poland have been eventually cancelled. In mid-2018, Chinese Ofo dockless bike-sharing company planned to launch its presence in Poland, mainly in Warsaw. Warsaw city authorities provided Ofo with a list of conditions to be met to start a business in the city. Eventually, Ofo stepped back from investments in Europe, focusing on the Asian market. It is also worth mentioning that the Chinese Stecol Corporation, which won in 2018 two tenders for the construction of two parts of a road in Poland, was eventually excluded from the tender due to some procedural mistakes.²⁴

²¹ Forsal.pl 2017.

²² Money.pl 2017.

²³ KALWASIŃSKI 2017.

²⁴ GRZYB 2018.

It seems that among the reasons for a new attitude were lessons learned from other Chinese investments. Polish officials rather openly admit that Poland is very cautious and would like to avoid what happened in Greece (Pireus) and Belarus (Wielki Kamien) – where China took full control over the investment or had access to the land where the investment was located. Other examples that are raised include the Belgrade–Budapest railway project that was scrutinised by the EU Commission, hostile and not transparent takeovers in Western Europe and Chinese investment skims based on loans and credits, which increase the debt of the host country with examples in the Balkans. The government started to highlight that money is not a key factor, as Poland has enough capital so far for infrastructural projects, e.g. from EU funds. In that sense, Poland is looking for technology and know-how and Chinese investors as partners, not money providers. It is argued that in the investment domain, Poland now presents a selective approach and would like to focus on those sectors where China may offer a comparative advantage. While in the trade domain, the presented posture is that huge trade deficit is a political issue and this message is a more vocal marketing to China.

It seems that the modification of Poland's approach is also connected with the wider global assumptions such as the resent discourse that China might not only be a partner but also a challenge: the rise of China as a global power, its greater engagement in the region which is becoming more visible in the Balkans but also in the Czech Republic and Hungary whose leaders pursue a pro-Chinese policy, the EU's more defensive approach towards China (e.g. discussions about an investment screening mechanism, cautions about BRI, etc.) and the perception that European countries might be put in an awkward position to choose between the U.S. and China. This assumption might be vindicated by Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki (appointed Prime Minister in December 2017) who said in an interview published in January 2018 that: "When I see our trade balance with China and the 1:12 ratio in favour of China, and in many countries in Central Europe the situation is similar, I wonder if we do not think about China using some clichés or even positive stereotypes such as placating the PRC for its openness. The possibility of providing services by foreign entities in China is extremely difficult. It is sometimes worth abandoning a political correctness, look at the numbers and be aware what the real challenges of the modern world are. And the United States think in a similar way. We

need a fair trade, as president Trump rightly pointed it out.”²⁵ In that sense, the Prime Minister underscored that Poland has a similar perception of China as the U.S. (U.S. records a huge deficit with the PRC as well) and signalled closer ties with the U.S. in terms of relations with China. While in June, Polish Minister of Finance, Teresa Czerwińska said that: “The Belt and Road Initiative must not be a tool of increasing power and control by any country”.²⁶ Finally, the Deputy Prime Minister’s attendance (instead of the PM) at the 16 + 1 summit in Sofia in July was a signal that Poland is not entirely satisfied with the cooperation with China. Poland’s discontent is also rising about China’s closer ties with Russia and its allies in Eastern Europe.²⁷

Conclusions

After a decade of intensification of bilateral dialogue, Poland–China relations are carried on three levels: bilateral, which includes central and local level; subregional – which means mostly 16 + 1 formula; and EU level. At the political level, bilateral relations are rather good – the best example is the change of bilateral ties into comprehensive strategic partnership. Political dialogue is maintained and is intensive – not only at the highest level such as heads of state, prime ministers and ministries of foreign affairs but also at the lower level including local cooperation (there are several examples of intensive cooperation between Polish and Chinese cities and regions). What is more, Poland’s representatives are taking part in all mechanisms under the 16 + 1 formula to have contacts with Chinese officials and to shape relations in various areas. The fact that there are three 16 + 1 mechanisms in Poland vindicated this approach. In that sense, Poland achieved its political goal in relation with China.

A worse situation has been created in the economic domain. Despite the very good “comprehensive strategic” political relations with China, Poland has not achieved its main economic goal – to narrow the trade deficit. Contrary, in the recent two or three years, trade deficit has been expanding significantly. In that sense, Polish officials started to use a different rhetoric

²⁵ Forsal.pl 2018; KALWASIŃSKI 2018.

²⁶ CHAUDHURY 2018.

²⁷ Sejm 2017, 5.

about trade deficit as a serious political problem. Despite the fact that in the last two years there are more Chinese investments in Poland, most of them are M&As (but it should be noted that several of them are perceived as high-quality takeovers), not *greenfield* investments which Poland is looking for. What is more, there are still no infrastructural projects under the BRI scheme and the goal to promote Morawiecki's plan similarly to what China is doing with its BRI has not been achieved as well. The reason for this might be Poland's rising caution as far as Chinese investments are concerned. In addition, the Team established by the Prime Minister in 2016, responsible for proposals of infrastructural projects that might be implemented with Chinese counterparts, does not work well either.

It is worth mentioning that at the EU level, Poland pursues a policy that is not very favourable for China. In that sense, Poland uses a manoeuvring approach to protect its interests. In 2016, Poland supported the EU decision not to grant China the market economy status, and did not oppose the first, harsher draft of the EU declaration after the Permanent Court of Arbitration in the Hague ruling, which rejected Chinese "historical rights" to the maritime areas of the South China Sea. While in 2017, Poland signalled a rather positive stance about the investment screening mechanism discussed in the EU.

China's rising global ascendance, examples of Chinese investments that might be a challenge for a recipient country, the restrained approach of "old" EU members and EU institutions due to rising Chinese influence in Europe, as well as the harsher rhetoric of the U.S. about China were probably among the reasons for Poland's realistic assessment of the "comprehensive strategic partnership" results. The outcome is Poland's more vocal rhetoric about trade deficit as a political issue, a more restrained approach towards Chinese investments (and a shift from a money-seeking to high-tech-provider narrative as well as a rhetoric that a capital has nationality) and a signal that Poland's policy towards China will be more leaning to the EU and the U.S. In case of minor (economic) gains despite "strategic" relations and facing potential challenges, the Polish stance which is to play two or three pianos – to present openly its discontent (e.g. about trade deficit, but also about the lack of 16 + 1 results, and concerns about China's ties with Russia), but having closer ties within the EU and with the U.S. and in that sense being a part of a big block which puts pressure on China, and still eager to cooperate with China – seems to be reasonable. It remains to be seen if it would work.

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