



NORMATIVE POWER EUROPE AND THE UYGHUR GENOCIDE

The effect of the Uyghur genocide
on the EU's norm diffusion policy

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Abstract

It is often theorised that the European Union is a normative power, but little is known about the EU's functioning as a normative power in areas further removed from its direct neighbourhood. China's influence in world politics has increased sharply in the last decade, but so have the worrisome reports on human rights violations, especially in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. Thus far, researchers believe that the EU reduces its normative approach in favour of economic interests in relation to authoritarian regimes.

The goal of this research is to investigate whether the events in Xinjiang – such as unlawful detentions, mass surveillance, forced labour – have influenced the EU's normative behaviour towards China. To do so, the thesis answers the following question: To what extent did the Uyghur genocide have an influence on the EU to change its normative policy towards China since 2014? In that year, the Strike Hard Campaign Against Violent Terrorism was launched.

To answer the research question, the thesis analyses eight key instances of EU interaction with the crisis, divided over three thematically different periods. The analysis makes use of the guidelines and questions formulated by Niemann and De Wekker to determine the level of normative intent, process, and impact of the actions and documents.¹

The research showed that the EU's policy towards China did become more normative due to the events in Xinjiang. It therefore concludes that the EU prioritises norms over economics in relation to authoritarian states such as China in critical situations. To further investigate this theory, additional research could focus on the tension in Hong Kong.

¹ Arne Niemann and Tessa de Wekker, 'Normative Power Europe? EU Relations with Moldova', *European Integration Online Papers*, no. 2010–014 (22 October 2010), 7-30.

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List of abbreviations

ALDE	Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
CAI	Comprehensive Agreement on Investment
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
DPRK	Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (North Korea)
ECR	European Conservatives and Reformists
EEAS	European External Action Service
EPP	European People’s Party
Greens-EFA	Greens-European Free Alliance
EFDD	Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy
ENF	Europe of Nations and Freedom
EP	European Parliament
EU	European Union
EUGS	European Union Global Strategy
GUE/NGL	European United Left/Nordic Green Left
HP/VP	High Representative/Vice President
HRD	Human Rights Dialogue
IJOP	Integrated Joint Operations Platform
ILO	International Labour Organization
MEP	Member of the European Parliament
NPE	Normative Power Europe
PRC	People’s Republic of China
UN	United Nations
UNHRC	United Nations Human Rights Council
US	United States
XPCC	Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps
XPSB	Xinjiang Public Security Bureau
XUAR	Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region

Introduction

In December of 2020, after seven years of discussion, the European Union and the People's Republic of China reached an agreement on an investment deal. This Comprehensive Agreement on Investment (CAI) offered both sides easier access to each other's markets and enabled EU businesses to compete in China. In return, China agreed to commit to sustainable development and has made promises on reducing forced labour. President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen called the agreement "an important landmark in our relationship with China and for our values-based trade agenda." Further stating: "It will also commit China to ambitious principles on sustainability, transparency and non-discrimination."² However, not everyone shared the same feelings about the agreement. A group of EU-China experts, including researchers from the Dutch International Relations think tank Clingendael, argue that the deal is a victory for China. The agreement does not include commitments to ban forced labour, nor means to verify whether the agreements are being followed. The expert group states that it will be more difficult to press China, especially since more reports on forced labour of Chinese minority ethnicities were brought to light.³

Recent developments, such as the premature dissolution of the special privileges in Hong Kong and the increasing number of reports on violations of human rights in the Uyghur ethnic minority group, are in stark contrast with EU norms and values. While the events in Hong Kong threaten the democracy of the Republic of China (Taiwan), products made by forced labour are directly imported into Europe, and Chinese mass surveillance and intelligence endanger the privacy of EU citizens and businesses, the EU might feel the need to change its policy to favour values over economic interests.

To find out whether this is the case, the thesis aims to answer the question: To what extent did the Uyghur genocide have an influence on the EU to change its normative policy towards China since 2014? This time period was chosen because China has recently started to take on a more assertive role in the international field, and because the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) launched the Strike Hard Campaign Against Violent Terrorism in 2014. The thesis hypothesises that the EU is forced to take on a stronger normative role due to the continuous violations of its core norms by China and the subsequent rising influence of China in the European sphere.

Three inquiries will be used throughout the analysis. Firstly, whether the chosen documents are a demonstration of normative power. Secondly, how the document or action differs from previous ones. And finally, in what way the document or action is motivated by the events in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. These will be elaborated upon in the theoretical framework.

² European Commission, 'EU and China Reach Agreement in Principle on Investment', European Commission, 30 December 2020.

³ A group of EU-China experts, 'EU Should Not Rush Investment Deal with China', EUobserver, 18 December 2020.

This research is unique in linking the concept of Normative Power Europe (NPE) to the Uyghur genocide in China. Generally, NPE research concentrates on regions in closer proximity to the EU. This case study illuminates the friction between the EU's economic interests and its values, which is of profound significance in its relationship with China. For these reasons, the thesis will contribute to the academic knowledge by broadening the research field, and its findings may aid EU policymaking.

Historiography

Von der Leyen talks about the EU's values-based trade agenda in the press statement on the CAI. This refers to the way that the EU uses norms in its foreign relations. This concept has been described by Ian Manners, who coined the term Normative Power Europe (NPE) in 2002. He describes the European Union as being constructed on a normative basis and therefore behaving in a normative way.⁴ Manners names the EU's core norms as peace, liberty, democracy, the rule of law, and human rights.⁵ Contrasting NPE with the notions of civilian and military power, he claims the EU is instead able to use a variety of power forms to shape the conceptions of "normal" in third parties.⁶ For example, the EU exports its norms using trade agreements, or in the case of the ASEAN, the ASEAN-EU Security Cooperation Framework.⁷

NPE has had a substantial impact on the research field but has not been without its criticism. Mark A. Pollack disagrees with the idea of the EU being a normative power. He argues that this is an ideal type, because it does not reflect the actual way the EU acts.⁸ Inadequate attention is being paid to economic interests, mixed motives, and human rights hypocrisy, for example regarding China.⁹ Another critique comes from the realist side. Adrian Hyde-Price criticises the Normative Power Europe theory, stating that the EU member states are the main players and use the EU to push their own policy priorities.¹⁰ Thomas Diez challenges NPE by claiming that it is not the first normative actor as the US can be seen as a normative power as well, and that NPE facilitates European identity construction but that this can become problematic without proper self-reflection.¹¹ Another critique comes from

⁴ Ian Manners, 'Normative Power Europe: A Contradiction in Terms?', *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 40, no. 2 (June 2002), 236

⁵ Manners, 'Normative Power Europe', 242.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 239-240.

⁷ Hubert Zimmermann and Andreas Dür, *Key Controversies in European Integration* (Macmillan International Higher Education, 2016), 196.

⁸ Zimmermann and Dür, *Key Controversies in European Integration*, 199.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 200-202.

¹⁰ Adrian Hyde-Price, "'Normative' Power Europe: A Realist Critique', *Journal of European Public Policy* 13, no. 2 (March 2006): 231.

¹¹ Thomas Diez, 'Constructing the Self and Changing Others: Reconsidering 'Normative Power Europe'', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 33, no. 3 (June 2005): 614, 632.

Helene Sjørusen, who problematises the idea of normative power, as it implies that acting in a normative way is a good thing.¹²

Sibylle Scheipers and Daniela Sicurelli agree that the EU being a normative power is linked to its identity formation and acknowledge that more reflexivity is needed, but that the lack of reflexivity does not undermine the EU as a normative power. In contrast to Diez's thesis, their case studies find that NPE is mostly defined when contrasting the EU to the US.¹³ Ian Manners has responded to the criticism his concept received. In response to Diez, he wrote that compared to the US the EU has different goals and takes the lead in ratifying international treaties.¹⁴ In 2009 he published a clarification of the concept, something that has been asked for by many of his critics, in which he explains a five-point conceptualisation of NPE.¹⁵ Finally, in 2013 Manners assessed the decade since the creation of his concept and argued that NPE is useful when studying "global politics by rethinking the nature of power and actorness in a globalizing, multilateralizing and multipolarizing era".¹⁶

The concept of normative power has been applied to areas further removed from Europe in the past years and therefore the debate has also developed in this part of the academic field. Regarding China, Giuseppe Balducci argues that NPE has little impact, especially on the subject of human rights, due to the conflicting levels of governance in the European foreign policy system. Although the member states and the EU institutions have the same interests regarding the promotion of human rights, Balducci argues that the dynamics of each level influenced the selection of policies and instruments to promote human rights in China. At the same time member states and institutions influenced each other in stressing economic interests when dealing with China. These two incidents caused the EU to fail to develop and maintain a human rights policy towards the PRC.¹⁷ The research of Anna Michalski and Niklas Nilsson concludes that the EU's self-identification as a normative power impeded the relationship with Russia and China when their self-confidence was boosted around the late 2000s, which made them increasingly resist the EU's normative policy. The EU was too slow to notice the changing attitude and expectations towards the EU by both Russia and China, and did not believe its normative policy was challenged. Only when the disparity was causing crises to arise did the

¹² Helene Sjørusen, 'The EU as a "Normative" Power: How Can This Be?', *Journal of European Public Policy* 13, no. 2 (March 2006): 236.

¹³ Sibylle Scheipers and Daniela Sicurelli, 'Normative Power Europe: A Credible Utopia?', *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 45, no. 2 (June 2007): 453.

¹⁴ Ian Manners, 'The European Union as a Normative Power: A Response to Thomas Diez', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 35, no. 1 (December 2006): 170-173.

¹⁵ Ian Manners, *The Concept of Normative Power in World Politics* (Kopenhagen: Danish Institute for International Studies, 2009).

¹⁶ Ian Manners, 'Assessing the Decennial, Reassessing the Global: Understanding European Union Normative Power in Global Politics', *Cooperation and Conflict* 48, no. 2 (June 2013): 304, 321.

¹⁷ Giuseppe Balducci, 'The Limits of Normative Power Europe in Asia: The Case of Human Rights in China', *East Asia* 27, no. 1 (March 2010): 53.

EU change its policies. In the case of China, Michalski and Nilsson state that this change entailed the EU dropping the norm-diffusion policy and implementing a more traditional diplomatic relationship.¹⁸ Neumann finds that the impact of NPE is highest when it is applied to states close to the EU's borders or where accession to the EU is in prospect.¹⁹ Eurasian states further removed from the EU are less open to the EU policy, partly due to the influence of China that shows an alternative to the European democratic model.²⁰ This means that not only does the EU have difficulty diffusing its norms in China, China also prevents the EU from doing so in some Eurasian states. Finally, Filip Tereszkievicz examined the European Union Global Strategy (EUGS) and concludes that the EU combines the promotion of its values with the safeguarding of its interests.²¹ He argues that the EU especially lets go of its normative role in its relationship with authoritarian regimes, such as China.²²

Although the concept of NPE soon celebrates its 20th anniversary, there is still no consensus on whether the EU actually is a normative power or not. This debate seems to be more contested when researching the concept in regions or states further removed from the EU, both geographically and ideologically. The academic literature surrounding NPE and China tends to claim that the EU discards its values in favour of economic interests when dealing with China. By focussing on a grave and recent infringement on the EU core norms in the form of the Uyghur genocide in China, this thesis ties to the debate in two different ways. Firstly, because it studies China and therefore adds information to the moderate amount of knowledge concerning NPE in states not bordering on the EU. And secondly, because it explores the response of the EU to an extreme event as a genocide in a state with which it shares an important trade relationship.

Theoretical framework

In his first publication on normative power, Manners describes six factors that facilitate norm diffusion in the EU's international relations. These are: contagion, the EU as an example to other political actors; informational diffusion, the result of strategic communications; procedural diffusion, the institutionalisation of a relationship; transference, diffusion that takes place when trading or giving aid; overt diffusion, the result of the physical presence of the EU; and the cultural filter, which affects how norms are perceived by third parties and which is important when dealing with China.²³ However,

¹⁸ Anna Michalski and Niklas Nilsson, 'Resistant to Change? The EU as a Normative Power and Its Troubled Relations with Russia and China', *Foreign Policy Analysis* 15, no. 3 (1 July 2019): 446.

¹⁹ Marek Neuman, ed., *Democracy Promotion and the Normative Power Europe Framework: The European Union in South Eastern Europe, Eastern Europe, and Central Asia* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2019), 192.

²⁰ Neuman, *Democracy Promotion and the Normative Power Europe Framework*, 194.

²¹ Filip Tereszkievicz, 'The European Union as a Normal International Actor: An Analysis of the EU Global Strategy', *International Politics* 57, no. 1 (February 2020): 110.

²² Tereszkievicz, 'The European Union as a Normal International Actor', 107.

²³ Manners, 'Normative Power Europe', 244-245.

Manners did not formulate a clear research approach in this article. Over the years, scholars have created several different frameworks to study NPE. This paragraph will outline these and finally formulate the analytical framework that will drive this research.

Nathalie Tocci describes three variables that need to be accomplished normatively, namely 'goals', 'means', and 'impact'. She defines goals as follows: "normative foreign policy goals are those that aim to shape the milieu by regulating it through international regimes, organisations and law."²⁴ The goal also needs to pursue international regularisation. 'Means' are defined as requiring to be within the law to be normative.²⁵ The actions need to have a traceable path to the building of an international rule-bound environment in order to have a normative impact.²⁶ Only when the actor normatively conforms to all three variables, can its policy be called normative.

Tuomas Forsberg distinguishes four mechanisms of normative power that follow the example set by Ian Manners. They are: persuasion, invoking norms, shaping the discourse, and the power of example. Persuasion implies that an actor uses for example propaganda, public diplomacy, and information campaigns to diffuse its norms, and is the mechanism most associated with normative power.²⁷ An actor can invoke norms when another party violates commitments. Invoking norms is closely related to Manners' procedural diffusion. Shaping the discourse is related to persuasion, but is instead an indirect form of power. It resembles Manners' cultural filter.²⁸ Lastly, the power of example is closely related to Manner's notion of contagion. Its effect is mostly visible in other regional organisations.²⁹

Finally, Arne Niemann and Tessa de Wekker distinguish three different levels of normative policy, namely: 'normative intent', 'normative process', and 'normative impact'.³⁰ Normative intent refers to the genuineness of the normative commitment. To figure out whether an actor has normative intent, they suggest asking four questions: Were norms at the centre or periphery of the interaction? Do the norms undermine the self-interest of the actor? To what extent does the actor act and communicate consistently? Does the actor behave coherently?³¹ In order for the process to be normative, it must be inclusive, reflexive, and it has to promote universal norms. Inclusiveness means that policymakers take into account the view of the party affected by the norm exportation. Reflexivity means changing behaviour when faced with better arguments and anticipating the consequences of exporting EU

²⁴ Nathalie Tocci, ed., *Who Is a Normative Foreign Policy Actor? The European Union and Its Global Partners* (Brussels: Centre for European Policy Studies, 2008), 7.

²⁵ Tocci, *Who Is a Normative Foreign Policy Actor?*, 10.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 11.

²⁷ Tuomas Forsberg, 'Normative Power Europe, Once Again: A Conceptual Analysis of an Ideal Type*: Normative Power Europe', *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 49, no. 6 (November 2011): 1196.

²⁸ Forsberg, 'Normative Power Europe, Once Again', 1197.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 1198.

³⁰ Niemann and de Wekker, 'Normative Power Europe?', 7.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 8.

norms. Universal norms are those that fall within the United Nations system, to prevent the EU from acting in an imperial manner.³² Lastly, to examine whether the actions have a normative impact, it needs to be assessed if change has taken place in the discourse or legislation in the receiving country, and whether that change is the result of the normative actions taken by the EU.³³

This research thesis will build on the theoretical frameworks formulated by the aforementioned scholars. It will especially make use of the work of Arne Niemann and Tessa de Wekker, because of their clear and elaborate analytical model. However, as this research will focus mainly on the European side, the criteria of normative impact will not be prioritised. This means that throughout the case analysis, it will mainly be determined whether the EU has a normative intent and applies a normative process. The research will also use Natalie Tocci's definition of normative policy goals, specifically that these goals shape the environment through international organisations and law. Tuomas Forsberg's four mechanisms are useful when determining whether an event or action falls under the realm of normative power options or not. The questions and indicators suggested by Niemann and De Wekker mentioned above will be used structurally in each chapter, thereby allowing potential development to become visible.

The theoretical framework allows subsidiary questions to be formulated. The guidelines and questions formulated by Niemann and De Wekker to determine normative intent, process and impact will be used to answer the question: Is the document or action a demonstration of normative power? This will make up the bulk of the analysis. Follow-up questions are: How does the document or action differ from previous ones? And finally: In what way is this document or action motivated by the events in Xinjiang?

Methodology

The Uyghur question was chosen as a case study for several reasons. Xinjiang is the biggest region in China and also the one furthest removed from the political and economic centre. It borders states like Kazakhstan and Afghanistan and houses the highest concentration of the Uyghur minority, a predominantly Islamic Turkic ethnic group. During the second part of the 20th century, the CCP launched a campaign to migrate ethnically dominant Han Chinese to Xinjiang, thus lowering the relative amount of Uyghurs in the region. The inequality between the Uyghurs and the Han grew, however, and the Uyghurs were faced with increasing restrictions. This resulted in protests that were met with extreme state violence. Restrictions increased and so did the unrest, cumulating in an exceptionally violent crackdown in 1997. The CCP labelled the events as terrorism, causing racial profiling and exclusion from society to occur. Riots followed protests in 2009 and heavy securitisation

³² Niemann and de Wekker, 'Normative Power Europe?', 9-10.

³³ *Ibid.*, 11.

of Uyghurs began. The early 2010s were characterised by increasing state policy and raids, especially on religious grounds. After an Uyghur attack on Han civilians in 2014, the CCP announced the Peoples War on Terror and the Strike Hard Campaign Against Violent Terrorism.³⁴

During the second part of the 2010s, the Chinese state started to use education camps to detain Uyghurs. These camps form the basis of political re-education and facilitated beatings, rape, deaths, and the transfer to high-security prisons. People released from the camps were often sent into forced labour. Those outside the camps experience a high level of surveillance.³⁵ In 2020 a report was released that provided evidence of systematic suppression of Uyghur births. In the past four years, hundreds of thousands of Uyghur women were subject to pregnancy checks, forced birth control, and forced sterilisation. At the same time, millions of Han citizens were settled in Xinjiang.³⁶ The high level of forced sterilisations has prompted some scholars and politicians to call the events in Xinjiang a genocide.³⁷ Likewise, increasing numbers of states are adopting the term ‘genocide’ to describe the treatment of Uyghurs by China.³⁸ For these reasons, this thesis refers to the crisis by using the label ‘genocide’.

Although these events take place in a region in China, far removed from Europe, they have an impact on the EU. Clothes and products made from forced labour are sold in the EU and numerous politicians have already asked for a ban on these items.³⁹ More recently it came to light that China has ratified an extradition treaty between China and Turkey, to deport Uyghurs living in Turkey to China.⁴⁰ With Turkey being a direct neighbour to the EU, this also threatens Uyghurs living in the EU. Finally, all actions taken by the CCP towards the Uyghurs – mass surveillance, disproportionate violence, unlawful detention, forced labour, and forced sterilisation – violate the EU’s core norms.

The research is conducted based on primary sources from the EU, such as policy documents, statements, and resolutions. Examples of these are the European Parliament resolution of 4 October 2018 on mass arbitrary detention of Uyghurs and Kazakhs in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, and the European Parliament resolution of 17 December 2020 on forced labour and the situation of the Uyghurs in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. These clearly show the stance of the EU towards the problem. Documents on the EU’s position from before this period are scarce, implying a

³⁴ Joanne Smith Finley, ‘Why Scholars and Activists Increasingly Fear a Uyghur Genocide in Xinjiang’, *Journal of Genocide Research*, 19 November 2020, 2-4.

³⁵ Smith Finley, ‘Why Scholars and Activists Increasingly Fear a Uyghur Genocide in Xinjiang’, 4.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 5-6.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 12; Joseph E. Fallon, ‘China’s Crime against Uyghurs Is a Form of Genocide’, *Fourth World Journal* 18, no. 1 (Summer 2019): 79; Joshua Lipes, ‘Canada’s Parliament Labels China’s Abuses in Xinjiang “Genocide,” Urges Government Action’, *Radio Free Asia*, 21 October 2020.

³⁸ ‘Lithuanian Parliament Latest to Call China’s Treatment of Uyghurs “Genocide”’, *Reuters*, 20 May 2021.

³⁹ Annachiara Biondi, ‘The EU’s Fight against Fashion’s Forced Labour Supply Chain’, *Vogue Business*, 3 August 2020.

⁴⁰ Mitra Nazar, ‘Oeigoeren in Turkije vrezzen uitleveringsverdrag met China’, 12 January 2021.

lack of knowledge or interest. This will be investigated further in the following chapters. In addition to these resolutions, the thesis will analyse statements made by EU officials. An example of these is the statement of the EU Delegation in China on International Human Rights Day of December 2019. These statements are the result of discussions and resolutions and show the message the EU wants to emit to the world. Along with EP documents, European Commission texts and actions such as the previously mentioned investment deal will also be taken into account, as this institution plays a crucial role in the policy-making process.

The analysis consists of three chapters, each focussing on a different period. The first chapter concentrates on the years after the launch of the Strike Hard Campaign Against Violent Terrorism, 2014 until 2017. This period is characterised by a relative lack of EU statements on the subject. This might be explained by the Eurozone crisis and the financial support given to certain EU member states by China, and the lack of information on the Uyghur situation. The second chapter centres around 2018 and 2019. More information reached the EU and awareness of the issue grew, which incited more action from the EU. The third and final chapter focusses on 2020 and 2021. After Chinese government reports leaked in 2020 and the extent of the conflict came to light, more votes were raised to condemn the actions by the CCP. The unprecedented sanctions on Chinese human rights offenders by the EU signify the end of the analysis.

Finally, it is important to note that the events are still ongoing and new information is released daily. The objective of the thesis is to use the most recent information available, however this might not be feasible in all cases. In addition to primary sources, the thesis will make use of secondary literature.

Chapter 1: 2014 – 2017

Introduction

This chapter concentrates on the period from 2014 until 2017, which directly follows the launch of the Strike Hard Campaign Against Violent Terrorism. It will start by describing the events that took place during and leading up to this period, before introducing and analysing the EU sources that are of interest in these initial years. This period is characterised by the limited amount of information on the situation and action taken by the EU.

This chapter will therefore be limited to analysing questions asked by members of the EU Parliament and their written answers. The three questions that will be used are the following: “Situation of the Uighur population in China” by Niccolò Rinaldi of March 2014, “Legislation in response to terrorism in Xinjiang” by Marc Tarabella of June 2015 and “Killing of 28 Muslims in Xinjiang, China” by Klaus Buchner of December 2015.

The period in context

By the first half of the 2010s, Xinjiang had been a hindrance to the CCP for decades. The region, which is home to mainly the Uyghur ethnic group, is far removed from China’s political centre. The location combined with the population’s ethnic division has made the CCP’s centralisation policy challenging. This has caused several efforts to integrate Xinjiang further into the Chinese society, which only increased the tensions between the two parties. For example, after the Great Western Development Initiative of 2000, an investment strategy used to improve the economic standing of China’s underdeveloped western parts, multiple riots took place. However, these events were only precursors of the crisis that would come to pass in the 2010s. In 2013 President Xi Jinping unveiled his new project; the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). This project aims to connect China to the world more ambitiously and efficiently than ever seen before and is reminiscent of the Silk Road. The Initiative also meant that Xinjiang had to be stable, as important routes would travel through the region. However, around the same time, the unrest peaked as several resistance acts occurred in 2013 and 2014. Xi responded by calling for unprecedented measures, and in 2014, Xinjiang became the most heavily securitised and politicised area in the world.⁴¹

The 2014 Strike Hard Campaign Against Violent Terrorism was a continuation of previous Strike Hard Campaigns which were first launched in the 1990s. These campaigns were initially aimed at separatists, but their nature changed after the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the US, after which the

⁴¹ Adrian Zenz, “‘Thoroughly Reforming Them towards a Healthy Heart Attitude’: China’s Political Re-Education Campaign in Xinjiang’, *Central Asian Survey* 38, no. 1 (2 January 2019): 103-104.

campaigns were aimed at terrorism.⁴² Whereas the Strike Hard Campaigns traditionally used increased surveillance as their main means, the 2014 Campaign increased the importance of re-education. In 2014, thousands of Uyghurs were subjected to re-education, with the duration of programmes varying from 4 to 20 days.⁴³ Re-education in this context refers to the process of detaining people for a certain amount of time to train them in military drill, patriotic singing, and others, in order to abolish existing beliefs.⁴⁴ At the same time, more attention was being paid to diminishing religious expressions, for example by the Project Beauty Campaign, which aimed to discourage Uyghur women from wearing a headscarf.⁴⁵ In short, the everyday lives of most Uyghurs living in Xinjiang became more scrutinised, controlled, and affected by the CCP than they had been in the decades prior to 2014.

This begs the question of how the EU reacted to the changing situation. Compared to the other two periods analysed in this study, this period is characterised by a relative lack of EU engagement with the issue. When scouring the EU institution's websites, it becomes clear that most of the activity is limited to questions asked in the European Parliament by the Members of Parliament. There are multiple explanations for this. Firstly, the EU was just starting to emerge from the debt crisis that had started in 2009. Consequently, the EU had not only been preoccupied with internal struggles, but China became an increasingly important factor in fighting the crisis. Certain member states were offered financial support and later on in the crisis, the EU initiated negotiations with China on contributing to the European Financial Stability Facility.⁴⁶ In addition, Chinese investment in the EU escalated during the Eurozone crisis.⁴⁷ The debt crisis therefore ensured that the EU had neither the time to fervently look into controversial events taking place in China nor was it in its interest. Secondly, there simply was not a lot of information concerning the measures taken against the Uyghurs leaving China and reaching the EU. Western news articles relating to Xinjiang from before 2016 mainly reported the attacks by the Uyghurs and discussed the tensions between China and the Uyghurs. For example, a BBC article from September 2014 titled *Why is there tension between China and the Uighurs?* concentrates mainly on Uyghur executed attacks, while touching only shortly on the increased securitisation measures taken by China.⁴⁸ The conflict had not yet escalated to the point where it caused major media attention and public outrage as it would later. These themes explain why the Uyghur question was not high up on the EU agenda yet.

⁴² Michael Clarke, 'China and the Uyghurs: The "Palestinization" of Xinjiang?', *Middle East Policy* 22, no. 3 (September 2015): 129.

⁴³ Zenz, "Thoroughly Reforming Them towards a Healthy Heart Attitude", 114.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 113.

⁴⁵ Clarke, 'China and the Uyghurs', 129.

⁴⁶ Júlia Mező and Beáta Udvari, 'Effects of the Debt Crisis on the EU-China Relations', 2012, 448.

⁴⁷ Jamil Anderlini, 'Chinese Investors Surged into EU at Height of Debt Crisis', 6 October 2014.

⁴⁸ 'Why Is There Tension between China and the Uighurs?', *BBC News*, 26 September 2014, sec. China.

Status quo

Before starting the analysis however, it is important to understand what the normative relationship with China looked like before 2014 to establish the status quo. In order to do so, the years leading up to 2014 will briefly be examined.

A formal diplomatic relationship between the EU and China was founded in 1985 after China transformed from a poor country to the economic powerhouse we know it as today and European integration institutionalised as never before. Both China and the EU have described the other as a 'strategic partner', emphasising their appeal to cooperate rather than to compete. In 2003 the two parties established their Comprehensive Strategic Partnership.⁴⁹ The reasons for the EU to engage with China in this way were threefold. Firstly, the EU had a normative objective in mind. By entering into the strategic partnership, it hoped to promote democratic values and institutions in China, thereby turning China into a more reliable partner. Secondly, the upgraded relationship would be beneficial to both parties in the context of the United States' increasing power. Finally, the relationship was a way for the EU to maintain an important role in world politics.⁵⁰ However, times have changed and the foundations upon which the relationship was built, have more often than not become irrelevant. China's power has increased sharply over the years, world politics is not anymore on its way to becoming unipolarly US-led, and the EU's attention was mainly to its internal troubles rather than external strategies. China's and the EU's interests have deviated and the Strategic Partnership has not become the tool it was intended to be.⁵¹

A Chinese-led study blames the EU for the deterioration of the relationship, stating that "the issue of human rights" is responsible for the conflict. Additionally, China's core interests would have been harmed by the human rights advocacy of European states.⁵² According to the study, the relationship improved after 2010, but the EU continued to show a "dual character", meaning that it was interested in deepening the cooperation, but unwilling to give up "inherent prejudice and suspicion". The study goes on to describe topics as human rights and Tibet as "hackneyed issues", but states that these problems did not hinder the strengthening of the relationship.⁵³ However biased this book may be, it does show that the EU was still incorporating human values into the affiliation, even though the relationship was not at its prime.

A paper requested by the European Parliament describes the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership positively, expressing its importance in developing the relationship. In 2013 the two bodies adopted

⁴⁹ Richard Maher, 'The Elusive EU-China Strategic Partnership', *International Affairs* 92, no. 4 (July 2016): 960.

⁵⁰ Maher, 'The Elusive EU-China Strategic Partnership', 961.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 962, 966.

⁵² Hong Zhou, ed., *China-EU Relations*, Research Series on the Chinese Dream and China's Development Path (Singapore: Springer Singapore, 2017), 38.

⁵³ Zhou, *China-EU Relations*, 39-40.

the EU-China 2020 Strategic Agenda for Cooperation, which would guide the strategic partnership.⁵⁴ A paper released by Deutsche Bank Research says that the EU and China are key trade and investment partners and describes the ties as being close.⁵⁵ These articles are both affirmative of the importance of the relationship, but do not make a mention of the promotion of EU norms before 2014 (the Parliament paper does mention it, but only in the context of 2017 and 2018).

To summarise, China and the EU did operate in a close relationship until 2014, but this relationship had its tensions. Whereas themes such as human rights were cause for friction, trade remained of significant importance.

Analysis

Situation of the Uighur population in China by Niccolò Rinaldi of March 2014

The first source to be analysed is the Parliamentary question titled *Situation of the Uighur population in China* of March 18, 2014 and its written answer by the then High Representative/Vice-President (HP/VP) Catherine Ashton.⁵⁶ The question relates to the 2014 railway incident and asks whether the EU is monitoring the situation, what steps the EU is taking to ensure that China follows international law, and whether the Commission will talk about the lack of freedoms and the human rights violations at its meeting with President Xi Jinping. HP/VP Ashton answers that the EU is consistently raising the issue of human rights in its interaction with China. Moreover, she writes that the EU will continue to monitor the situation in Xinjiang.

Norms are the core motivation for asking these questions, as Member of the European Parliament (MEP) Niccolò Rinaldi expresses concern for the rights and freedom of the Uyghurs. In HP/VP Ashton's answer, she attests that the protection of human rights is frequently talked about with China. Raising the concern for human rights in China could undermine the self-interest of the EU, as it is known to frustrate the Chinese. However, upholding key values such as human rights also benefits the EU, as it strengthens its credibility as a normative actor and was believed to turn China into a more stable partner. According to the HP/VP, the EU consistently advocates for the human rights of minorities in China, for example at the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) and the EU-China Human Rights Dialogue (HRD). However, it has been argued that the HRD is ineffective and that member states frequently lack support for promoting human rights in China.⁵⁷ The EU's behaviour is therefore not coherent, since the

⁵⁴ Anna Saarela, 'A New Era in EU-China Relations: More Wide-Ranging Strategic Cooperation?', 12 April 2018, 6.

⁵⁵ Hannah Levinger and Syetarn Hansakul, 'China-EU Relations: Gearing up for Growth' (Deutsche Bank Research, 31 July 2014): 15.

⁵⁶ Niccolò Rinaldi, 'Situation of the Uighur Population in China', 18 March 2014.

⁵⁷ Max Roger Taylor, 'Inside the EU-China Human Rights Dialogue: Assessing the Practical Delivery of the EU's Normative Power in a Hostile Environment', *Journal of European Integration* 0, no. 0 (9 December 2020): 12.

interaction surrounding human rights does not follow a sensible path. This is especially the case for the protection of Uyghur rights, which the question specifically referred to, but the answer barely mentioned. Therefore, the intention behind asking the Parliamentary question was normative, but the actions taken as described in the HP/VP's answer do not fully show normative intent.

From this document, it does not seem that the normative process is inclusive. HP/VP Ashton writes about the several times human rights have been brought up when conversing with China, but does not mention the view of the Chinese on this topic or the impact these actions have on China. The process is similarly not shown to be reflexive, since the answer shows no anticipation of the consequences of raising the human rights issues in China on the Uyghur problem. The answer only tells what has been done thus far. However, the answer shows that the process does promote universal norms, as many of the actions taken fall within the UN system. Bilateral means are also used, but the commitment to working within the UN framework shows that the EU actions are not based on one-sided values, but on universal ones. The process is therefore only partially normative.

It is not probable that the Parliamentary question and the actions described in its answer have had a normative impact. The analysis demonstrated that the intent and process are only partially normative and previous studies indicated that the means used by the EU as described in the answer have not proved to be effective. As history has shown, the violation of human rights in Xinjiang has only increased after 2014. The actions therefore have not had any result on the situation of the Uyghurs.

[Legislation in response to terrorism in Xinjiang by Marc Tarabella of June 2015](#)

The second Parliamentary question is named *Legislation in response to terrorism in Xinjiang* and was posed by MEP Marc Tarabella on June 12, 2015.⁵⁸ The question refers to a recently passed anti-terrorism act in China, which is believed to result in powerful anti-terrorist bodies with a broad definition of terrorism which could include dissident and peaceful criticism of the Chinese government. It asks whether the Commission supports this act or shares the abovementioned concerns. Former HP/VP Federica Mogherini answered that the EU opines that public security measures have to respect human rights and expressed concern about the use of counter-terrorism to justify the restrictions of freedoms. The EU provided comments on the draft anti-terrorism act whereby it emphasised on the need to define concepts as extremism and to ensure the act would adhere to international law.

Norms were central to the comments the EU provided on the draft act during the public consultation. It especially placed importance on norms like human rights and freedom of expression, and expressed

⁵⁸ Marc Tarabella, 'Legislation in Response to Terrorism in Xinjiang', 12 June 2015.

its concern about the treatment of suspects and the level of surveillance. The EU used high-level meetings to address the root causes of the unrest. The comments do not undermine the self-interest of the EU, as they were given during a public consultation and therefore solicited. The content of the comments would possibly vex China, but this would not impact the EU's interests. As before, a more democratic and stable China is of benefit to the EU. The communication is consistent and builds on the practice as seen in the first source. It still uses the same instruments: the UNHRC and the EU-China HRD. Again, the efficacy of these instruments, particularly the HRD, can be questioned. The actions taken by the EU around this issue are coherent, since the comments given to the draft law clear and follow logically from EU norms. The EU also aims to address the root problems of the unrest in Xinjiang with China, of which the importance is clearly linked to the anti-terrorism act. The actions described in the HP/VP Mogherini's answer are evident of a certain normative intent, but do not tick all boxes.

Because the comments on the act were provided during the public consultation, the process is inclusive. However, there is no mention of the impact of the norm exportation mentioned that takes place in other settings, outside of public consultations. HP/VP Mogherini also does not indicate potential consequences of the norm exportation and instead leaves it at actions that have been taken already and will be taken in the future. This reduces the reflexivity of the process. As with the previous source, part of the action takes place within the UN institutions, confirming that the norms exported are universal. Altogether, the process falls short of the requirements needed to be normative.

The EU comments on the draft act have not had an impact on the legislation. This is evident by the questions posed by MEP Tarabella. These questions came after the public consultation during which the EU gave its advice, but mention the same issues the EU had commented on. The new law is still thought to threaten human rights, as was the case with the draft act. The actions taken by the EU therefore lack normative impact.

[Killing of 28 Muslims in Xinjiang, China by Klaus Buchner of December 2015](#)

The final question analysed for this period, titled *Killing of 28 Muslims in Xinjiang, China*, refers to the execution of suspects of terrorism by the Chinese authorities.⁵⁹ Three questions are asked by MEP Klaus Buchner on December 9, 2015, namely whether the Commission considers these actions a form of persecution of the Uyghur minority, how the Commission addresses abuses of human rights activists in Xinjiang, and what consequences this will have for trade. Former HP/VP Mogherini answers that the EU systematically raises the human rights issue in the EU-China HRD and has called for easier access to Xinjiang by diplomats and journalists.

⁵⁹ Klaus Buchner, 'Killing of 28 Muslims in Xinjiang, China', Parliamentary questions, 9 December 2015.

MEP Buchner specifically asks about the deadly persecution of the Uyghurs and the abuses of human rights activists. However, HP/VP Mogherini does not answer these exact questions and instead paints a broad picture of the actions the EU takes to protect the rights of Uyghurs and of human rights in general. Although these actions do have a normative motivation, they are not specific to this case. It therefore seems that no direct action has been taken after these deaths. HP/VP Mogherini has not raised this specific incident with China, but has more generally asked for the Uyghur rights to be respected. This general approach does not undermine EU interests as a direct reaction might have done. China has often been very vocal about its national affairs being of no concern to foreign bodies, so directly criticising the events and policies in Xinjiang might have increased tensions between China and the EU. The answer states that the EU systematically uses the UNHRC and the EU-China HRD to address the human rights situation, which is consistent with previous communication. The EU issued a statement after the expulsion of journalist Ursula Gauthier, who had written about Beijing's policy in Xinjiang. However, it did not issue such a statement after the killing and persecution of dozens of Uyghurs. This behaviour is not coherent. The answer to the Parliamentary question therefore shows a lack of normative intent.

The answer does not openly show that the view of the Chinese authorities has been taken into account, but by not taking direct action after news of the killings reached Europe, this does appear to be the case. However, this action is not inclusive of the Uyghur point of view. Again, the written answer holds no evidence of any reflexivity, as it does not mention anticipated consequences. Mogherini finishes the answer by stating that the EU systematically uses the UNHRC, which again shows that the norms fall within the UN system. This makes the promotion of universal norms the only aspect of a normative process that holds true.

As we know now, the persecution of Uyghurs has only increased since the events mentioned in the Parliamentary question. It is therefore not plausible that any change has taken place in China due to the actions taken by the EU as described in the written answer. Hence, these did not have a normative impact.

Conclusion

A common denominator of these three sources is that neither fully confirms to the three requirements of normative policy as set out in the theoretical framework. Since the EU's insistence to discuss human rights with China has proved to be troublesome for China and since there have been periods of increased tension between the two parties, the EU was possibly hesitant to exert too much pressure. Previous studies have also shown that not every member state was in favour of raising human rights issues with China.⁶⁰ The actions taken by the EU as described in the three written answers by the two

⁶⁰ Taylor, 'Inside the EU–China Human Rights Dialogue', 11.

High Representatives/Vice-Presidents consequently demonstrate a half-hearted attempt at normative power vis-à-vis China. Even though the Chinese authorities have started to take serious action against the Uyghurs, the behaviour of the EU is not very different from that of before 2014. Statements are made at UN meetings and the issue is raised at the EU-China HRD. However, due to the lack of transparency, it is impossible to know exactly what has been discussed. It is clear from the activity within the European Parliament that the events in Xinjiang were reason to take normative action. Nevertheless, the European Union did not utilise this knowledge to take decisive action.

Chapter 2: 2018 – 2019

Introduction

This chapter will focus on 2018 and 2019. Whereas information was scarce in the previous period, 2018 and 2019 are characterised by an increase in information reaching Europe, which consequently caused the awareness on the issue to grow and incited more action from the EU. This period sees the adoption of the first EU Parliament resolution on the Uyghur genocide, which shows a development of the EU's normative policy in China.

Contrary to what had been the case in the first chapter, in 2018 and 2019 the EU publicly spoke out against the persecution of the Uyghurs. The following part will analyse two sources, the European Parliament resolution of 4 October 2018 on mass arbitrary detention of Uyghurs and Kazakhs in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region and the Statement of the EU Delegation in China on International Human Rights Day of 10 December 2019.

The period in context

The media was largely responsible for the increasing amount of information and awareness on the situation in Xinjiang. In an opinion article for the New York Times in February 2018, Professor James A. Millward explained the increase in surveillance and state repression in Xinjian since the start of the securitisation programme by regional CCP leader Chen Quanguo in 2017.⁶¹ This includes checkpoints, patrols, DNA collections, GPS tracking and spy apps, as well as an increase in strict regulations, leading up to 5 per cent of the Uyghur population being detained. Millward went on to link this policy to the Belt and Road Initiative and potential consequences for Hong Kong and Taiwan.

On August 7th, 2018, the Guardian published an online long-read article detailing the conversations journalist Gene A. Bunin has had with Uyghurs in China, titled *'We're a people destroyed': why Uighur Muslims across China are living in fear*.⁶² He described the discrimination Uyghurs outside of Xinjiang experience, while at the same time Uyghurs in Xinjiang suffered from suppression. Bunin mentioned the torture, violence and brainwashing that happened behind the walls of the concentration camps. Upon returning to an interviewee a year later, Bunin learned that he had been jailed and died after heavy labour. Bunin himself described it as state-sanctioned murder. When he wrote about his recent travels in Xinjiang, it is clear to the reader that the state oppression had taken over people's daily life. Euphemisms as 'at school' or 'gone' were used for people that have been put in the concentration

⁶¹ James A. Millward, 'Opinion | What It's Like to Live in a Surveillance State', *The New York Times*, 3 February 2018, sec. Opinion.

⁶² Gene A. Bunin, "'We're a People Destroyed': Why Uighur Muslims across China Are Living in Fear", the Guardian, 7 August 2018.

camps and the Uyghurs refrained from reading books, messaging family abroad or even looking at the reporter.

In August 2018 it was revealed that the UN had received reports that a million Uyghurs were being held in internment camps in China.⁶³ A UN official estimated that two million Uyghurs were forced into indoctrination camps. Additionally, the article cites that Uyghur students returning to China from abroad have been detained and in some cases have died in custody. The BBC followed up on this report with an article to explain the situation in more detail, showing satellite images of the camps and giving accounts of previously detained Uyghurs, who describe the punishments and tortures in detail.⁶⁴ The article also pays attention to the denials of Chinese officials and the fact that no state had taken any action yet.

Finally, in 2019 PBS News Hour released a comprehensive overview of the events in Xinjiang.⁶⁵ It claims that at least 85 camps have been constructed mostly between 2017 and 2018. Although the Chinese government had denied the existence of these camps, they were forced to acknowledge the so-called re-education centres after satellite images had been published. The article states that there is enough evidence to be certain that re-education was not the purpose of these camps. These articles show that the world knew about the violence, oppression, and human rights violations in Xinjiang in 2018.

What kind of effect did this knowledge have on the relationship between the EU and China? In March 2019, the Commission reviewed the relationship with China and described China as a partner and a systematic rival.⁶⁶ The most important action taken with the Uyghur issue in mind is that new guidelines on environmental and labour standards have been published. On a more generic level, the EU continued to use the existing policy framework for EU engagement with China from 2016, in which it had also called on China to protect the rights of minorities in Xinjiang.⁶⁷ However, this semantic change from strategic partnership to systemic rival does hold some value; the foreign policy towards China, which had often been described as soft, was now open for harsher methods. This was especially beneficial for the EU, since China had been gaining a stronger foothold in Europe by investing in certain infrastructure. Member states that have benefitted from these investments, such as Hungary, Greece, and Italy, had been acting favourably towards China.⁶⁸ This disunity within the EU is valuable for

⁶³ Stephanie Nebehay, 'U.N. Says It Has Credible Reports That China Holds Million Uighurs in Secret Camps', *Reuters*, 12 August 2018.

⁶⁴ Roland Hughes, 'China Uighurs: All You Need to Know on Muslim "Crackdown"', *BBC News*, 8 November 2018, sec. China.

⁶⁵ Brennan Butler, 'What Is Happening with the Uighurs in China?', *PBS NewsHour*, 7 October 2019.

⁶⁶ European Commission, 'Commission Reviews Relations with China, Proposes 10 Actions', Text, European Commission, 12 March 2019.

⁶⁷ Council of the European Union, 'Council Conclusions on EU Strategy on China' (Brussels, 18 July 2016).

⁶⁸ Axel Berkofsky, 'China and the EU: "Strategic Partners" No More', *Institute for Security and Development Policy*, 4 December 2019, 2.

China.⁶⁹ Although an opening for a shift in policy had been given, not much changed in actuality. Brussels continued to perceive China as a cooperation partner.⁷⁰

Analysis

European Parliament resolution on mass arbitrary detention of Uyghurs and Kazakhs

The European Parliament resolution of October 2018 follows several motions proposed by the Greens–European Free Alliance (Greens–EFA), European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR), Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy (EFDD), Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D), Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE), and European People's Party (EPP) groups. A debate followed the proposals on October 4th, during which almost all speakers condemned the actions of China in Xinjiang and drew parallels with the concentration camps of the Second World War.⁷¹ The Europe of Nations and Freedom (ENF) group is the exception, with speaker Jean-Luc Schaffhauser referring to Islamic terrorism and doubting the number of detainees. Overall, most speakers point out the right of freedom of religion and the respect of basic human rights, and Wajid Khan, the speaker of the S&D group, asked for bigger action than the resolution. The resolution was adopted by a majority vote.

The resolution refers to the constitution of the PRC, which guarantees the rights of minorities and the right to freedom of religion, previously taken actions by the EU regarding China, the UN concern over the re-education camps, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.⁷² It goes on to state the deterioration of human rights since the inauguration of President Xi, the believed amount of one million detained Uyghurs, the horrific living conditions in the camps that have been reported, and the amount of surveillance in the area. Finally, the resolution calls on China to stop the mass persecution, release prominent Uyghur figures, allow free access for journalists, and follow international human rights law. The Parliament asks the VP/HR and the EEAS to intensely monitor the human rights situation in Xinjiang.

Throughout the debate and in the final resolution, the European Parliament shows that norms take a central position in this act. This is evident by the vast number of references made to norms such as human rights and freedom of religion. The resolution also urges member states to accept Uyghur asylum claims, which can only be motivated by the EU's core norms such as liberty and human rights.

⁶⁹ Hans von der Burchard, 'EU Slams China as "Systemic Rival" as Trade Tension Rises', POLITICO, 12 March 2019.

⁷⁰ Berkofsky, "'Strategic Partners" No More', 4.

⁷¹ European Parliament, 'Debates - Mass Arbitrary Detention of Uyghurs and Kazakhs in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region - Thursday, 4 October 2018', European Parliament, 4 October 2018.

⁷² European Parliament, 'European Parliament Resolution of 4 October 2018 on Mass Arbitrary Detention of Uyghurs and Kazakhs in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region', 4 October 2018.

It is possible that this resolution would undermine the self-interest of the EU, as China is known to retaliate against anything that is regarded as criticism of the government's behaviour. This is also referred to during the debate by Urmaz Paet of the ALDE group, who noticed that the international community is often overlooking China's human rights problems due to pragmatic issues: "Mr President, lately the focus of the international community has tended to fade away from the human rights violations in China for certain pragmatic reasons, but a country wishing to be an economic superpower should not be allowed to violate the rights of its people."

Compared to the communication by the Parliament as seen in the previous period, this proposal is inconsistent, as it is stronger in language and action compared to parliamentary questions. However, the content of the resolution is more consistent with the previous sources since all instances refer to the human rights abuses in Xinjiang and ask for EU action in the matter. The resolution is very coherent and well-considered, as is expected from a resolution. It thereby differs from the parliamentary questions, which do not fit in the same internationally acknowledged mould as the resolution does. The document is clear and easily understandable by any government official around the globe.

The resolution is inclusive, as it shows deliberation to the effect of norm exportation this instance would have on China. This is shown by referring to China's own law regarding human rights and minorities: "having regard to Article 36 of the Constitution of the People's Republic of China, which guarantees all citizens the right to freedom of religious belief, and to Article 4 thereof, which upholds the rights of 'minority nationalities'." The document also states that China expressed interest in adhering to values as human rights, democracy, and the rule of law in its own development and international cooperation. Although the resolution contains strong language towards the Chinese government, it does not testify to reflexive behaviour, that is neither the debate nor the resolution mentions the possible consequences of this act. The resolution does promote universal norms; for example, it repeatedly references the UN. Furthermore, it refers to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The European norms that the resolution cites, have been discussed and agreed upon with China long before. This resolution is therefore not enforcing EU norms, but promotes international values.

As history has shown, the situation in Xinjiang did not change after this resolution. However, around the same time the resolution was adopted, other states and international bodies had also been exerting pressure on China. Later in October Shohrat Zakir, chairman of Xinjiang's government, responded to the concern by calling the camps 'humane', something that was refuted immediately by former inmates.⁷³ This comment, following a policy of silence and denial, could be viewed as an effect

⁷³ Chris Buckley, 'China Breaks Silence on Muslim Detention Camps, Calling Them "Humane"', *The New York Times*, 16 October 2018, sec. World.

of the norm diffusion. However, this is probably a result of collective attention to the problem and would not have taken place if the EU solely issued a resolution.

Statement of the EU Delegation in China on International Human Rights Day

On the 71st anniversary of the proclamation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the United Nations on December 10, 2019, the EU delegation in China issued a statement regarding the lack of protection of human rights in China, especially in Xinjiang and Tibet.⁷⁴ It states the growing restrictions of multiple freedoms, unlawful detentions, the destruction of religious sites, mass surveillance, and the intimidation of Uyghurs living abroad. The EU is concerned about the restrictive access of journalists in the region, restrictions on information, and the arrests of human right defenders. The text lists several of these activists and asks for their release. The statement finally ends with a reference to a common commitment between the EU and China to uphold international human rights law and universal values and states that the EU is ready to work within the EU-China HRD.

The Mission of China to the EU also issued a statement for the same occasion.⁷⁵ The statement starts with establishing the importance of human rights protection, especially with respect to the direction of individual states. It goes on to state the changes that have been made in China, such as lifting 1.4 billion people out of poverty, and claims that Chinese citizens fully enjoy rights and freedoms provided by law. The statement lists numerous problems with human rights in the EU, including the refugee issue, the increase of racism, and the abominable conditions in prisons, and argues that it is not fair of the EU to criticise China. China urges the EU to stop interfering in domestic affairs and maintains that there is no one-size-fits-all model in human rights development.

In the statement of the EU, norms were clearly at the centre, not in the least since International Human Rights Day inherently is a normative event. However, the statement is fairly standard and does not mention anything that has not been made clear in the past. The statement is therefore normative, but not revolutionary, and resembles previous statements made for the same occasion, except for the added attention paid to Xinjiang: “The EU is concerned at the continuously worsening human rights situation in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region and in Tibet. Reports point to severe restrictions of the freedom of expression and association, and of the freedom of religion or belief in all of China; as well as continuous large-scale extra-judicial detentions.”

⁷⁴ Delegation of the European Union to China, ‘Statement of the EU Delegation in China on International Human Rights Day’, Text, EEAS - European External Action Service - European Commission, 10 December 2019.

⁷⁵ Mission of China to the European Union, ‘Statement by the Mission of China to the EU on Human Rights Day’, Chinamission, 10 December 2019.

Since the content of this statement was quite predictable, it is likely that it did not have a negative influence on the self-interest of the EU. Nevertheless, China does not appreciate EU concern for human rights within Chinese borders, as became clear from the delegation's speech. Continuous perceived nagging by the EU could cause tensions, which are disadvantageous to the relationship. The EU communicates very consistently. As mentioned before, statements similar to the one described above are issued every year on International Human Rights Day and are often not too different from the previous issuance. Compared to the resolution declared by the Parliament in 2018, the language of this statement is less strong and decisive. Still, it falls within the line of expectations and is therefore consistent. The statement is also coherent. It is obvious that the text is well written and well thought out, and the message that needed to be conveyed is phrased carefully. The statement is extremely coherent when compared to Human Rights Day statements made to China in previous years, but this also means that it does not naturally connect to the 2018 proposal, since the strong condemnation of Chinese actions in Xinjiang did not wholly transfer to the statement.

When looking at the inclusiveness of the normative process, it does not seem like the EU considers the Chinese view, as is the impression given by the Chinese statement. China and the EU have different definitions of human rights, and China feels that it is imprudent of the EU to export its own version of human rights to China. The history of Human Rights Day statements does not demonstrate a high level of reflexivity; the message is almost the same each year, and apart from restating the willingness to work with China within the EU-China HRD, the statement does not indicate anticipation of the consequences of the norm diffusion. Compared to the Parliament resolution, the weaker language of this statement – made by a delegation that falls under the European Commission – may well take into account the effect a stronger worded statement would have, thereby anticipating potential consequences would this be the case. According to the statement itself, it does promote universal actions. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is referenced, as is the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. According to the statement made by the Mission of China to the EU, universal human rights do not exist and therefore the EU is pushing its own standard on China.

The statement did not have an effect on the situation in Xinjiang. The EU expressed its readiness to work with China within the HRD, which takes place without media coverage or reports. Several human rights organisations have criticised this type of silent diplomacy, as it is not effective enough and does not reach ordinary citizens.⁷⁶ These organisations urge the EU to take visible action, which would make the normative impact much higher.

⁷⁶ Front Line Defenders, 'China's Year-End Crackdown on Human Rights Defenders Betrays Its International Commitments', Front Line Defenders, 6 January 2020; Kenneth Roth, 'Europe Needs to Stop China's Assault on the Global Rights System', Human Rights Watch, 11 February 2020.

Conclusion

This period saw an increase in the amount of news and reports coming out of Xinjiang and reaching the EU. This information led to rising indignation in EU citizens and political leaders, culminating in the 4 October 2018 European Parliament resolution on mass arbitrary detention of Uyghurs and Kazakhs in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, the first collective resolution made on the issue by the EU. A year later, the Delegation in China explicitly mentioned the Uyghurs in its statement of the EU on International Human Rights Day.

The two declarations are both a demonstration of normative power, albeit in different ways. The resolution is more defined in conveying a strong sense of condemnation, but the European Parliament holds little executive power. The statement is phrased with more care for a possible adverse reaction, thereby losing the impact it could have had coming from this institution. These documents are different from the ones analysed in the previous chapter in the sense that these are published and actively communicate a message to foreign actors, whereas previously actions regarding the violation of Uyghur rights were limited to internal Parliamentary questions. This shows development of EU attention and action on the matter. The resolution is clearly motivated by the events in Xinjiang and specifically accommodates this issue. The statement on the other hand is more general, but also made room to address the human rights violations in Xinjiang and is therefore partly motivated by the Uyghur issue.

Chapter 3: 2020 – 2021

Introduction

The final chapter of this thesis covers the period from around the beginning of 2020 until the first quarter of 2021, when the EU implemented unprecedented sanctions. The issue was nowhere near resolved at this time, but the period does offer some interesting developments that will be analysed further in this section. These include the leaking of classified documents and reports about Xinjiang to Western media sources and the imposing of sanctions by the EU on Chinese individuals for the first time in thirty years.

This chapter will analyse three key actions by the EU during this period, namely the European Parliament resolution of 19 December 2019 on the situation of the Uyghurs in China (China Cables), the European Parliament resolution of 17 December 2020 on forced labour and the situation of the Uyghurs in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, and the Council Decision and Implementing Regulation concerning restrictive measures against serious human rights violations and abuses.

The period in context

Starting at the end of 2019 and continuing into 2020, multiple secret Chinese government documents were leaked through a network of exiled Uyghur activists to journalists, giving an unprecedented look inside the human rights abuses in Xinjiang. The first of these were the China Cables, which include a telegram, security briefs, and a court document from 2017.⁷⁷ The telegram is a secret manual for operating the detention camps, approved by Zhu Hailun, the region's top security official. The intelligence briefs contain information on the connection between mass surveillance and the detention camps, whereas the court document describes the reasons for sentencing an Uyghur man to 10 years for ideological crimes.

Soon after followed the Xinjiang Papers, hundreds of documents including a set of instructions to handle the reaction of Uyghur students returning from studying abroad to the disappearance of their families.⁷⁸ The documents show that President Xi Jinping laid the groundwork for the detainment camps and policy in 2014 in a series of speeches, calling to show no mercy. Some pages also show the nervousness of officials to the possible spread of information to other regions in China, by elite Uyghur students studying in the bigger cities.

Then followed the Karakax files, a spreadsheet containing incredibly detailed records of detainees in Xinjiang, including a list of family members, identification number, and an assessment of their daily

⁷⁷ ICIJ, 'Read the China Cables Documents - ICIJ', 24 November 2019.

⁷⁸ Austin Ramzy and Chris Buckley, "'Absolutely No Mercy': Leaked Files Expose How China Organized Mass Detentions of Muslims', *The New York Times*, 16 November 2019, sec. World.

activity.⁷⁹ A person is judged on the three circles, family, social and religious associations, to determine whether they are allowed to go home. The records show that many people are not detained for crimes, but for having too many children, owning a passport, or reading “illegal books”. The data is collected by government officials who are sent to live in the houses of Uyghur families. The released data shows that some people are sent to factories where they have to do forced labour.

Apart from leaked documents, more and more personal accounts of camp survivors reached the media. These stories paint a gruesome picture of the forced labour, torture, rape, mutilations, and forced sterilisation the prisoners have to endure. A report was released in June 2020 that showed proof that Uyghur women were forced to undergo abortions, involuntarily were implanted with an IUD or received surgery, and were injected with fluids that stopped menstruation or caused irregular bleeding.⁸⁰

In a BBC interview with formerly detained Uyghur women, the extent of the torture and rape becomes painstakingly apparent.⁸¹ A woman talks about how masked men came into the room to pick girls, who were then taken to “black rooms” (rooms without security camera’s) and screamed all night long. She herself was raped three different times by several men. Another woman says that she was forced to strip women naked and handcuff them, to wait until the men were finished, and to bring the women back to the cells. One woman says she was kicked until she started to bleed internally, only to later be tortured with an electrical stick inside her genital tract. The women inside the camp were not allowed to speak about their experiences and numerous women lost their minds, according to one account. Former British diplomat to China Charles Parton claims that there is “no doubt whatsoever that this is Xi Jinping's policy.”

At the same time these reports and stories came out, the EU and China were negotiating a comprehensive investment deal, meant to strengthen the economic relationship between the two parties, to make trade easier and internal markets more accessible. The deal was finally agreed upon at the end of 2020, to the satisfaction of Xi Jinping, who saw the deal as an opportunity to drive the EU away from the US.⁸² This all came to a halt however, when the EU imposed sanctions on four officials involved in the human rights violations in Xinjiang. China retaliated by placing its own sanctions on ten Europeans, including MEPs from five prominent EP parties, two China studies scholars, and three members of national parliaments who led resolutions that described the situation as a genocide.⁸³

⁷⁹ Ivan Watson and Ben Westcott, ‘China’s Xinjiang Records Revealed: Uyghurs Thrown into Detention for Growing Beards or Bearing Too Many Children, Leaked Chinese Document Shows’, 18 February 2020.

⁸⁰ ‘China Forcing Birth Control on Uighurs to Suppress Population, Report Says’, *BBC News*, 29 June 2020, sec. China.

⁸¹ Matthew Hill, David Campanale, and Joel Gunter, ““Their Goal Is to Destroy Everyone”: Uighur Camp Detainees Allege Systematic Rape’, *BBC News*, 2 February 2021, sec. China.

⁸² Ben Hall, ‘Sanctions Spat Has Forced EU to Reassess Its China Strategy’, *Financial Times*, 31 March 2021.

⁸³ Euronews, ‘EU Agrees First Sanctions on China in More than 30 Years’, *euronews*, 22 March 2021.

With these sanctions, the relationship became more strained than ever. China has also started to boycott several European companies, most notably H&M. The EU is extremely vulnerable to economic coercion, since its trade system is the most internationally connected one in the world, and China seems to be making use of this weakness.⁸⁴ These events changed the relationship drastically compared to the periods before. As said by MEP Miriam Lexmann: “If China continues with this kind of response it will make clear that it is not interested in being a partner but rather a systematic rival that undermines fundamental values and principles that are *condicio sine qua non* for any cooperation.”⁸⁵

Analysis

European Parliament resolution on the situation of the Uyghurs in China (China Cables)

The debate previous to the ratification of the European Parliament resolution of 19 December 2019 on the situation of the Uyghurs in China (China Cables), is characterised by common indignation at the information that has been made public with the China Cables.⁸⁶ Speakers are especially concerned about the amount of surveillance in the region and the conditions in the camps, which some speakers describe as concentration camps. The speakers also often refer to Ilham Tohti, an Uyghur freedom fighter to whom the Sakharov Prize was awarded and whose freedom the EU often demanded. The representatives unanimously condemn the actions of China in Xinjiang, and most explicitly ask for more EU action, specifically in the form of a human rights sanction mechanism.

The China Cables resolution was the most extensive one to date.⁸⁷ As before, the Parliament refers to the actions taken previously by the UN and the EU, the Constitution of the PRC, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The resolution acknowledges that human rights in China have deteriorated since President Xi Jinping assumed power, especially in Xinjiang since the launch of the Strike Hard campaign of 2014. This is linked to the BRI. It also refers to the testimonies of former detainees, who revealed the horrific situation in the camps, including beatings and sexual abuse. The Parliament states that the China Cables prove that the repressive measures were prepared on the highest political level since 2014 and that Uyghurs residing in the EU have been harassed and arrested upon return by Chinese authorities. The EU pledged to place human rights at the centre of its relations with third countries in the Strategic Framework on Human Rights and Democracy. Furthermore, the resolution condemns detentions and other inhumane acts against specific groups that are

⁸⁴ Jonathan Hackenbroich, ‘Chinese Sanctions: How to Confront Coercion and Avoid a Squeeze on Europe I – European Council on Foreign Relations’, *ECFR* (blog), 1 April 2021.

⁸⁵ Euronews, ‘EU Agrees First Sanctions on China in More than 30 Years’.

⁸⁶ European Parliament, ‘Debates - Situation of the Uyghur in China (China-Cables) (Debate) - Wednesday, 18 December 2019’, European Parliament, 18 December 2019.

⁸⁷ European Parliament, ‘European Parliament Resolution of 19 December 2019 on the Situation of the Uyghurs in China (China Cables)’, 19 December 2019.

unacceptable in the international legal framework. It notes the imbalance of press access between the EU and China and states that the EU should take the lead on a resolution concerning this problem during the UN HRC. Finally, the Parliament calls on private actors to inspect their supply chain to ensure they are not involved in human rights violations and expresses its disappointment in the fact that previous EU engagement with China has not ensued any results.

This resolution is a completely normative document that serves no other purpose than to ensure that human rights are respected in China. In the resolution, the Parliament reaffirmed its vow to place human rights at a central position in all interaction with third countries. As seen before, the CCP objects to criticism of its internal affairs and perceives it as provocative. The EU's insistence to address China's human rights issues may therefore be a hindrance to a fruitful trade relationship, and would thereby undermine the economic interests of the EU. This resolution fits within the line of previous action and interaction by the EU towards China, although it is more wide-ranging and commanding than the documents seen before. Still, the EU is a consistent actor concerning communication around the Uyghur issue. This resolution is also coherent.

Neither in the debate nor the resolution do the members of Parliament explicitly consider the view of China on the norm exportation. However, they do often refer to international covenants and declarations that China signed, and to the Chinese Constitution. During the debate, many MEP's make clear that the human rights violations are grave enough to warrant all attention on them. This is illustrated by the following quote of MEP Ignazio Corrao:

Madam President, all this is unacceptable. Despite the continuous call by the international community and the recent publication of documents proving the shameful repression taking place in the Xinjiang Uyghur autonomous region, the Chinese Government shows an absolute indifference, and continues to violate human rights and fundamental freedoms. It is absolutely disconcerting that a country like China, which increasingly aspires to become a credible and reliable interlocutor in the global context, must show such a serious violation of fundamental rights. As if that were not enough, China continues its activity of persecution of Uyghurs and other minorities outside the national borders. This must provide us appropriate reflections and countermeasures.⁸⁸

Additionally, there is no apparent sign that the members of Parliament anticipated the potential consequences of the resolution. The resolution does promote universal norms. It often refers to international law and the United Nations framework.

This resolution did not cause change to take place in China, as was the case with previous EU action. The resolution admits this fact: "expresses its disappointment at the fact that the 37th round of the

⁸⁸ European Parliament, 'Debates - Situation of the Uyghur in China (China-Cables) (Debate) - Wednesday, 18 December 2019'.

EU-China Human Rights Dialogue brought no substantial results ... regrets the fact that the approach taken and tools used by the EU so far have not yielded tangible progress in China's human rights record, which has only deteriorated over the last decade.”

European Parliament resolution on forced labour

There is nearly unanimous outrage against the actions of China in Xinjiang during the debate preceding the adoption of the resolution about forced labour and the situation of the Uyghurs in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region.⁸⁹ This debate took place on 17 December 2020, by which time the MEPs were familiar with the horrifying stories of camp survivors. They talk about the tortures, forced abortions, and forced labour, most notably in the cotton industry. Some also mention that people from Hong Kong can find a safe home in Europe and that the EU should support partners such as Taiwan. It seems that the resistance against China is growing. MEP's call on international businesses to stop trade with goods made in Xinjiang, one states that Europe personally holds President Xi accountable, another argues that the EU should have a genuine conversation with Beijing instead of being in a perpetual state of condemnation, and several MEPs promote the use of the new European Magnitsky sanctions mechanism. Only the left-wing and far-left GUE/NGL group is against this resolution, as they think it is hypocrite and supports the US confrontation policy.

The resolution refers to the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, which says that 'no one shall be held in slavery or servitude' and that 'no one shall be required to perform forced or compulsory labour' and the International Labour Organization (ILO) Forced Labour Convention of 1930, which has not fully been ratified by China.⁹⁰ It states that 84% of Chinese cotton originates from Xinjiang and more than 80 international corporations have allegedly made profit from Uyghur forced labour. The Parliament calls for EU investments to respect ILO conventions on forced labour in the EU-China Comprehensive Agreement on Investment, which was negotiated around the publication of the resolution. The resolution strongly condemns government-led forced labour and the fact that European brands have been benefitting from it. It requests China to allow an unrestricted mission from the European Parliament to Xinjiang. Finally, it expresses concern about the exportation of electronic surveillance technology from China to authoritarian regimes.

This resolution is mainly about forced labour in Xinjiang and strongly condemns this and other human right violations. Norms are therefore at the centre of the interaction. This resolution undermines the

⁸⁹ European Parliament, 'Debates - Forced Labour and the Situation of the Uyghurs in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region - Thursday, 17 December 2020', European Parliament, 17 December 2020.

⁹⁰ European Parliament, 'European Parliament Resolution of 17 December 2020 on Forced Labour and the Situation of the Uyghurs in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region', 17 December 2020.

EU economic interests more profoundly than the ones before, since it explicitly criticises the role of European corporations in the forced labour of Uyghurs. Asking these brands to boycott products made in Xinjiang could well impact its revenue. This happened to H&M after it expressed its concern for human rights in its supply chain and Chinese citizens reacted with outrage.⁹¹ Most of the content of the resolution is consistent with previous ones, with the additional attention on forced labour. Its language is clear and coherent.

The debate and the resolution create the illusion that the Parliament has lost concern for potential Chinese retribution, with MEPs holding President Xi personally accountable and the resolution not holding back with demands. It seems like the Parliament expected no consequences of this resolution, as the resolution states requests for the EU-China Comprehensive Agreement on Investment, which was being negotiated around the same time and of which the Parliament assumed would be agreed upon. In accordance with previous resolutions, the resolution does promote universal norms, mostly by referring to international agreements and the UN framework. However, this resolution also mentions the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, which is purely European and not globally ratified.

It is difficult to determine whether change has taken place following this resolution, due to the short time span between its publication and this analysis. Compared to previous resolutions, this one has a higher probability to achieve change, due to its call for measures by international businesses.

[Regulation concerning restrictive measures against serious human rights violations](#)

On March 22, 2021, something remarkable happened; the EU imposed sanctions on China for the first time in thirty years, since the 1989 Tiananmen Square crackdown.⁹² The sanctions were set out in the Official Journal of the European Union and were made possible by the EU Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime. The regulation states that “the Union remains deeply concerned about serious human rights violations and abuses in different parts of the world, such as torture, extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances or systematic use of forced labour committed by individuals and entities in China, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK), Libya, Eritrea, South Sudan and Russia” and therefore imposes restrictive measures to eleven persons and four entities, including four Chinese people and one Chinese entity. Zhu Hailun, Former Deputy Head of the 13th People’s Congress of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR), held a key political position and has been described as the “architect” of overseeing and implementing a large-scale surveillance, detention and

⁹¹ Vanessa Friedman and Elizabeth Paton, ‘What Is Going On With China, Cotton and All of These Clothing Brands?’, *The New York Times*, 29 March 2021, sec. Style.

⁹² Council of the European Union, ‘Council Decision and Implementing Regulation Concerning Restrictive Measures against Serious Human Rights Violations and Abuses (Including List of Sanctioned Individuals)’, *Official Journal of the EU* 64 (22 March 2021).

indoctrination programme targeting Uyghurs. Wang Junzheng held several senior positions in the XUAR and Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (XPCC) and held a key political position in charge of overseeing and implementing the aforementioned programme. Wang Mingshan, several senior positions in the XUAR and Xinjiang Public Security Bureau (XPSB), is responsible for maintaining internal security and law enforcement and from 2017 to January 2021 held a key position in Xinjiang's security apparatus. Cheng Mingguo, director of the XPSB and Vice- Chairman of the XUAR People's Government, is directly involved in implementing the programme, as well as the "Integrated Joint Operations Platform" (IJOP), used to track millions of Uyghurs in Xinjiang. Finally, the Regulation adds state-owned economic and paramilitary organisation XPCC to the list for its responsibility for large-scale arbitrary detentions and degrading treatment inflicted upon Uyghurs and systematic use of forced labour.

The sanctions are very normative in nature, since they directly target human rights offenders. They undermine the self-interest of the EU, as became clear immediately when China imposed its own sanctions on multiple MEPs. Additionally, the sanctions jeopardised the Comprehensive Agreement on Investment and European brands were targeted by Chinese boycotts. However, the Chinese sanctions on the MEPs might not have the result they hoped for, as poorly considered sanction by China in Europe have previously brought member states closer together.⁹³ Since this is the first time the EU imposed sanctions on China and this is undoubtedly the greatest action taken by the EU so far regarding the Uyghur genocide, the sanctions are not very consistent with previous actions. The overarching message of condemnation remains consistent. The sanctions as specified in the regulation are clear and leave no room for misinterpretation.

The regulation is concise and does not demonstrate consideration for the view of China regarding the sanctions. The frustrated reactions of some MEPs following China's sanctions indicate that these retributions were not expected. The Regulation does not refer to any UN frameworks to support the sanctions. However, the sanctions were imposed in coordination with the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom.

It is too early to know whether change has taken place in China after the sanctions were imposed. If the sanctions were cause for change, then this should be attributed to the coordinated approach of the Western powers.

⁹³ 'Andreea Brînză, 'China's EU Sanctions Are the Latest Proof: Beijing Doesn't Understand Democracies', 25 March 2021.

Conclusion

Whereas before knowledge of the situation in Xinjiang came from reports and satellite photos, this period is characterised by the personal stories of camp survivors, which made the circumstances much more tangible to European citizens. The very detailed leaked reports show exactly how the policy works and who is responsible. This, together with the implementation of the EU Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime, makes it possible for the EU to take direct and decisive action, targeting known human rights offenders.

The three documents are all a demonstration of normative power. The resolutions are fully in line with previous actions taken by the EU, but something as powerful as the sanctions has not been used before in connection with the Uyghur question. The resolutions strongly condemn Chinese actions in Xinjiang and are all sent to the Chinese government, but the sanctions actively affect Chinese officials. This is an evident policy shift by the EU, one that is motivated by the events in Xinjiang and the increasing information on those issues.

Conclusion

This thesis sought to find out whether the Uyghur genocide had an influence on the EU to change its normative policy towards China since 2014. The key concept used to answer this question was Normative Power Europe, which theorises that the EU acts normatively as it inherently is a normative organisation. A brief analysis of the relationship between the EU and China before 2014 showed that it was mainly based on economic interests, rather than normative values.

After establishing EU policy towards China before the mass persecution of Uyghurs started in 2014, the thesis continued to analyse the EU's response to three key instances between 2014 and 2021. These cases were analysed using the guidelines to determine the level of normative power in policy as described in the introduction.

The research has shown a clear progression of the EU's stance on its relationship with China regarding the Uyghur genocide.

Between 2014 and 2017, the extent of EU action was limited to Parliamentary questions and the Commissions use of existing platforms such as the EU-China Human Rights Dialogue to raise its concerns. There is some normative intent, and the Parliamentary questions show this to a higher degree than the actions taken by the Commission, but the normative impact is lacking since the EU did not take decisive action. As more information started to trickle out of China, concern in Europe increased and the EU moved to passing resolutions. These were of both higher normative intent and impact than the documents and actions of the preceding period, while still falling within the guidelines for normative processes, thus following international standards. Finally and most recently, the EU took its most resolute action yet, by imposing sanctions on Chinese individuals and legal bodies violating human rights.

This analysis shows that the Uyghur genocide did have an influence on the EU's policy towards China. Apart from the resolutions and sanctions, this is made exceptionally visible in the suspension of the Comprehensive Agreement on Investment, on which negotiation was finalised at the end of 2020. The CAI was intended as a means to improve Europe's access to the Chinese market, but the human right violation sanctions and the ensuing diplomatic tension gained the upper hand.

Thus far, Normative Power Europe was mostly studied in relation to the EU's neighbouring states. Regarding China, some scholars theorised that the EU lets go of its values policy when engaging with authoritarian regimes and takes an economic approach. This is mostly true, however this research has shown that it is possible for the EU to prioritise norms over economics.

It is important to note however that the circumstances, a crisis more and more often referred to as genocide, are unusual and this research cannot claim the willingness of the EU to prioritise its

normative values over its economic interest would be equal without the grave human rights violations as seen in this case. However, since the analysis followed established guidelines and used a vast sample size, the results of this research are valid. It was not the goal of this thesis to study the entire extent of the relationship between the EU and China.

Further investigation could study whether the theory that the EU prioritises norms over economics in its relationship with China when faced with extreme cases is true. Case studies could be the increasing assumption of power by the CCP in Hong Kong or Chinese hostility in the South China Sea. Since this study was finalised before it was possible to measure the impact of EU sanctions on the Chinese policy in Xinjiang, this could be a topic for follow-up research.

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