

YOUNG FINE GAEL

The Future of Irish-Chinese Relations

YOUNG FINE GAEL POLICY PAPER

The logo for Young Fine Gael, featuring the letters 'YFG' in a bold, white, sans-serif font. A small white star is positioned to the left of the 'Y'. The logo is set against a yellow rectangular background.



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Foreword

This document is the result of months of hard work by the International Committee. From the start of the committee's term, we wanted to work on detailed policy on what we all saw as the biggest long-term geopolitical challenge of our time - the rise of China as a global superpower, and its challenge to liberal-democracy.

We began our work by meeting various experts on China from academia, politics, diplomacy, and journalism. To avoid compromising their impartiality we will not name those from outside politics who met with us, but we thank them very gratefully for giving us their time and providing fascinating insights. We would like to thank Minister Simon Coveney, Senator Barry Ward, and Taiwanese Representative to Ireland Pierre Yang for meeting with us and being very generous with their time. We were also delighted to host a fascinating discussion with Senator Ward and Representative Yang during YFG's 'Cosgrave Weekend' conference in Athlone. This allowed us to engage with the wider YFG membership on this topic before beginning to write our document.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine occurred while we were in the middle of finalising the document. While the invasion profoundly shocked, angered and saddened all of us, it did not change our view that China, not Russia, is the real primary long term challenger to the West. It also confirmed to us that the position we put forward in this policy paper is the correct one for Ireland, particularly on a moral level.

I would like to thank the Committee for their excellent work. In particular, I would like to thank Aine Cooke. Aine's detailed policy knowledge is unrivalled, and as our policy officer she is responsible for putting together much of this document. Our thanks also to the YFG National Executive for their constant support and facilitation of the design and printing of the document. Finally, we hope both YFG members and the Fine Gael senior party will see this paper as an important statement on how YFG, and indeed we believe much of the youth of Ireland as whole, would like to see Ireland's policy position towards China develop.

Eoin Scarlett

International Secretary, Young Fine Gael





Introduction

China is undoubtedly a global superpower and political colossus and this shall remain the case for many decades to come. It is a fact that Ireland and the world must recognise and adapt to because the impact on our lives will be sizable. Deng Xiaopeng's market reforms, following the calamitous Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution, provided the foundation and driving force for China's phenomenal economic performance and it now stands on the verge of becoming the world's largest economy. Furthermore, it has rapidly transformed into a military behemoth with an enormous navy, advanced artificial intelligence capacity, and growing nuclear capabilities. However, China today poses a significant threat to the values and freedoms that Ireland and our allies seek to protect and promote.

China is a wonderful country with a rich history and profoundly textured and vibrant culture. It has a brilliantly innovative and persevering population who have made invaluable contributions to literature, science and technology. We have no quarrel with China or the Chinese people, and abhor the despicable racism many Chinese people have encountered during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is China's government that is the problem, and when we use the word 'China' throughout this document, it is to the government to which we refer, not the country or its people.

The litany of crimes committed by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is long. China has illegally annexed Tibet, and engaged in substantial efforts to suppress its unique culture. In Xinjiang, China is committing cultural and demographic genocide, enforcing a regime of slave labour, interning millions of Uyghurs, engaging in horrific acts of torture, implementing forced sterilisation and forced abortions, and eradicating symbols of religious expression. Christians and other religious groups are also subject to religious persecution, denying them of their fundamental right to practise their faith. The CCP is accelerating its provocative actions against Taiwan, with more frequent incursions in Taiwan's ADIZ while rhetoric regarding an invasion and forced unification is deeply concerning. In Hong Kong, the Chinese

Communist Party has violated the Basic Law and Hong Kong's once famed freedom and democracy is now a despicable sham. In the South China Sea, China persists with its illegitimate sovereignty claims, despite the 2016 UNCLOS arbitration ruling, and its belligerence presents a major impediment to freedom of navigation in what is a vital trade route. It suppressed information on Covid-19 while simultaneously pressuring states to keep flights with China open even as cases in the country soared, thus subjecting the world to vast disruption and unnecessary deaths. It has also engaged in economic coercion campaigns against Lithuania and Australia, manifesting its deep intolerance of legitimate criticism and willingness to intimidate less powerful states.

The question thus arises; why does this all matter to Ireland? Firstly, we are a country whose intrinsic values are predicated on the belief that all people are entitled to freedom and human dignity. The Chinese government has denied all Chinese people their democratic rights, especially in Hong Kong, Tibet and Xinjiang, and indeed, these values are antithetical to their despotic regime. But there are many repressive regimes in the world and yet they cannot all be categorised as a significant threat to the world order, or have the capacity to undermine Ireland's sovereignty and security.

China's vast population, economic power, and global ambitions make it far more than one of many authoritarian regimes in the world. The CCP is engaging in a full-scale, comprehensive effort to remake the global order to one more tolerant of authoritarianism. This is based on China's policy that national sovereignty should trump all claims of entitlement by citizens to the human rights enshrined in the United Nations (UN) 'Universal Declaration of Human Rights.' In reality, this means support and encouragement for authoritarian regimes all over the world. Indeed, China's approach is not just theoretical in this regard, it is actively supplying high-tech IT systems and AI to many repressive governments to enable them to carry out mass surveillance of their populations and crush domestic dissent. The CCP is also encouraging and aiding these

regimes economically by forging many new trade agreements with these states.

China's strengthening alliance with Russia is also deeply concerning. In early February 2022, President Xi Jinping of China and Vladimir Putin of Russia signed a 'Strategic Partnership Agreement' stating their determination to boost cooperation between the two countries across economic, political, and military domains. This agreement is the culmination of many years of the two regimes moving closer together and must be seen as a comprehensive ideological challenge to the West. We should be in no doubt as to China's stance on the Russian invasion of Ukraine. China has refused to condemn the invasion, abstained on a UN Security Council (UNSC) resolution condemning the assault, and is actively helping the Russian Government avoid Western economic sanctions as much as possible by replacing Western technology, buying Russian debt and stocks, and increasing exports to Russia. Chinese state media is also spreading Russia's propaganda relating to the war both in and outside China, particularly through social media. Russia's invasion of Ukraine should be seen not just as an isolated episode with Russia as the sole aggressor, but as part of a broader, long term aggressive challenge to Western liberal-democracy by authoritarian states led by China and Russia. Put simply, our Western democracy is under attack by China and Russia - economically, diplomatically, politically, ideologically, and now even militarily. In such a struggle, for a proud European democratic nation like Ireland, firmly part of the West, there can be no neutrality.

We believe Ireland's policy towards China is out of date. It was formed at a time when Western leaders understandably pursued a policy of deepening economic links with China in the hope that over the long term Chinese politics would become democratised. Sadly, the opposite has occurred. The CCP has used

China's economic growth to justify its own authoritarian rule, and has commandeered the internet and new technology to create a high-tech mass surveillance state that is more repressive than ever. The Irish Government must acknowledge this reality and change policy. We must seek to reduce and re-direct trade with China, while condemning China's human rights abuses much more loudly on a global stage. The policy of criticising China primarily behind closed doors in the hope that this will yield better results than doing so publicly is clearly failing, with the CCP becoming more not less repressive at home and abroad. China's shockingly aggressive economic sanctions against Lithuania, a similar small EU member state, and its illegal detention of Irish businessman Richard O'Halloran, should leave us in no doubt that China is not a reliable or desirable trading partner for Irish businesses. We must also not be naive that the CCP is clearly pursuing the same industrial policy it has pursued in other Western countries in Ireland. This involves attempting to make one industry so dependent on trade with China that they effectively become a lobbyist against political actions that may harm trade with China. In Ireland, China is attempting to do this with the agricultural industry. We must not allow ourselves to fall victim to and be intimidated by this tactic.

Ultimately, no one can argue that increased trade with China does not present enormous potential economic benefits for Ireland and all countries. However, we in YFG believe that there are some things more important than our raw economic self-interest. Respect for human rights, defence of liberal-democracy, Western values of liberty, and a rules-based international order fall into this category. This policy document lays out a number of key specific policy changes we think Ireland should pursue in its relations with the Chinese state. It is time to put our values before our balance sheets.



Recommendations

1 YFG calls for the introduction of legislation requiring social media outlets and websites to declare in a transparent manner whether content is produced or sponsored by Chinese state-owned or state-controlled entities or any external state actor.

In 2018 YouTube began labelling news broadcasts that receive government funding as it vowed to be stricter about content at the globally popular online video-sharing service. This gave transparency to viewers of YouTube's news content about the funding behind the content and potential bias that could be present in such content. Unfortunately, this positive move has not been followed by other social media or video sharing platforms. In the era of disinformation YFG calls for legislation to be introduced to have similar labels introduced to other platforms to increase transparency.

2 YFG calls for the introduction of legislation to prohibit social media companies from sending the data of Irish consumers to China or any authoritarian state.

In 2020 the Chinese social media giant Tik Tok announced a €600 million investment in Ireland for its first European data centre. However, as reported in multiple Irish media channels, questions remain about how much data will this Irish data centre share with Chinese authorities. The facility, to be located within Echelon's Dublin data centre campus, will process not only Irish but also European user data from 2023 onwards. Before this data centre becomes active it is imperative that legislation is brought forward to ensure there is knowledge of what information will be collected and sent to Chinese authorities.

3 YFG recommends that Ireland should pursue greater policy coordination with the U.S. on China policy, particularly by working to further develop the U.S.-EU Trade and Technology Council.

The United States is Ireland's biggest single export market, accounting for over 29% of Irish exports in 2020. This dwarfs our trade with China, which accounted for just over 6% of our exports in 2020. The U.S. is one of Ireland's closest allies, a fellow liberal-democratic republic, with deep cultural, historical, linguistic, and family ties between our people. The Russian invasion of Ukraine has also served as a reminder of just how much Ireland depends on the U.S. and UK for its security. With the U.S. increasingly at odds with China on the global stage, it makes both political and economic sense for Ireland to prioritise our relationship with the U.S. over China and seek to align our policy towards China more closely to U.S. policy. One way of doing this would be for Ireland to engage more actively in the U.S. - EU Trade and Technology Council. Ireland should push for the Council to meet more regularly and be more ambitious in its activities. We should also encourage the possibility of establishing similar mechanisms for coordinating EU and U.S. positions in other important international policy areas.

4 YFG calls on the Government to work with the agricultural industry to reduce and mitigate against any potential sudden international shocks affecting agricultural exports, and for the growth and development of export markets in growing Asian economies as well as increasing exports to existing markets.

YFG calls for the Minister for Agriculture to work with the sector to develop a plan to reduce the exposure

of the agricultural sector to the prospect of Ireland's agricultural exports being weaponized to constrain our foreign policy through economic coercion. The example of Lithuania should serve as a warning that we must prepare for this possibility. YFG further recommends that the Minister works with the agriculture sector to pivot toward exporting more to Asian markets which share Ireland's democratic values such as Taiwan, South Korea, India, Japan, etc.

5 YFG calls for the Government to provide more resources to the EU's 'Global Gateway Initiative' in Africa as well as playing an active role in this initiative to offer developing nations with a pro-growth, pro-democracy alternative to China's 'Belt and Road Initiative.'

The EU's 'Global Gateway Initiative' (GGI) is an exciting strategy of investment in the EU's extended neighbourhood, primarily in Africa. YFG calls on the Irish Government to increase our funding support to the GGI and play a very active role in its implementation. This also offers large investment opportunities in rapidly growing markets for Irish companies.

6 YFG calls on the Government to advocate within the EU for the development of the EU's Neighbourhood Policy as an instrument for countering China's rising influence in the EU's extended neighbourhood, particularly in the western Balkans.

7 YFG calls for the removal of the triple-lock mechanism and its replacement with a double-lock mechanism, requiring only Dáil and Government approval for the deployment of more than 12 Irish troops overseas.

China and Russia's increasingly aggressive behaviour demonstrates clearly that these countries should have no say whatsoever in whether Defence Forces personnel can deploy overseas or not. The likelihood that the UNSC will be divided for a protracted period and will struggle to approve new UN peacekeeping missions also makes it imperative that the Government removes the triple-lock in order to allow the Defence Forces to maintain its high overseas commitment. YFG has long argued for the removal of the triple-lock as a principle of national sovereignty and we believe the time is now right for a change in policy.

8 YFG calls for the participation of Naval Service vessels on joint freedom of navigation patrols with European and other Western navies in the Indo-Pacific to symbolise Ireland's commitment to unimpeded commerce, freedom of navigation, international law and the rules-based order.

The recent seven-month tour of the Royal Navy's aircraft carrier strike group to the Indo-Pacific was not a standalone UK deployment. Elements of the Dutch and U.S. navies were fully integrated with the group, and joint exercises were also conducted with the Australian, Japanese, Indian, and New Zealand navies among others. Given the UK and several EU countries have signalled their intention to conduct many more similar deployments in the future, YFG calls on the Irish Government to propose the deployment of Naval Service vessels on similar future deployments. This would be an excellent opportunity for the Naval Service to upskill, train, and better integrate with its European counterparts. It would also signal Ireland's steadfast commitment to freedom of navigation. We acknowledge that this may require removal of the triple-lock mechanism and the upgrade of Naval Service vessels.

9 YFG recommends that the Irish Government direct investment towards strategic industries, such as artificial intelligence, 5G infrastructure, and semiconductors, in order to provide Irish and European alternatives to Chinese products and protect Irish security.

YFG calls on the Irish Government to launch a strategy of investment in the research and development of key strategic high-tech industries. The Biden administration's 'Innovation Act' is one template for investing in these technologies which the Government could seek to replicate on an Irish scale. It is vital that there are Western alternatives to Chinese high-tech products, particularly in the areas of AI, semiconductors, and 5G infrastructure. Ireland as a hub for the IT industry should seek to be an innovation leader within the EU in developing these alternatives. The Government should demonstrate its support for making Ireland an innovation leader in these rapidly growing technologies by laying out a program of investment and incentives to encourage Irish R&D in these sectors.



10 YFG calls for public-funded third-level academic institutions to review the presence of Confucius Institutes to assess how this may impede their mission to preserve academic integrity and prevent foreign state-controlled actors from exercising improper influence over academic institutions and curricula.

Confucius Institutes are a foreign influence instrument of the Chinese government, and it is improper for these bodies to be involved in the shaping of curricula or the teaching of subjects related to China as part of accredited academic courses. This undermines academic integrity in institutions funded by the Irish taxpayer as courses taught by or significantly shaped by the Confucius Institute are incapable of being impartial. Further, it is contrary to the principle of the university being an arena for rigorous debate and high-quality fact-based learning.

11 YFG calls for the establishment of an IDA office in Taiwan.

Like Ireland, Taiwan is a vibrant market economy and staunch advocate of free trade. The opening of an IDA office in Taiwan would offer a fantastic opportunity to develop commercial ties and provide Irish enterprises with lucrative export and investment options.

12 YFG recommends the development of greater academic links and exchanges with Taiwan.

Ireland and Taiwan both host formidable academic institutions and place great importance on education. Increasing academic links and exchanges would allow Irish students to experience Taiwan's fantastic universities while heightened links between Irish and Taiwanese universities could precipitate greater collaboration on a range of projects.

13 YFG calls for a prohibition on former politicians from working for authoritarian governments or for authoritarian state-controlled entities.

YFG expects public officials to act with integrity and in the national interest both during their incumbency and after leaving office. Working for foreign powers who undermine democracy, and the rule of law is contrary to this principle. Fine Gael should introduce a clause to expel members who bring the party into disrepute by violating our steadfast commitment to democracy and the rules-based order.

14 YFG recommends that Ireland use its diplomatic leverage at the EU and engage with developing nations at the UN to form common positions on China.

As a small nation, Ireland has limited hard power capabilities. However, we have enormous soft power and should utilise this diplomatic prowess to act as an interlocutor on policy initiatives relating to China. Ireland also has a unique capacity to engage with developing nations and should cultivate these relationships at international organisations in order to outline the risks that China may pose to their sovereignty and security.

15 YFG calls for Ireland to work with other democratic states to prevent institutional capture of international organisations by individuals who seek to promote the goals of the Chinese Communist Party rather than the organisation that they are selected to lead.

Those who lead international organisations should seek to act in the best interests of that entity rather than furthering the aims of a state actor. China is a major global power and should actively participate in international organisations, but its candidates frequently seek to use these institutions to improperly promote Chinese political interests. Ireland should use its diplomatic leverage to build coalitions to oppose leadership candidates who will not promote the mission and goals of the international organisations that they seek to represent.

16 YFG calls for a review of Chinese influence on the Leaving Certificate curriculum.

Irish students deserve high-quality education, and this should be provided by the Department of Education free from pressure or improper influence from foreign actors. These concerns are especially relevant for the Leaving Certificate Chinese curriculum. A review should be conducted to ensure that the course provides the best learning opportunities and outcomes for students and is not shaped by the political goals of the Chinese state.

17 YFG calls for the Irish government to support an EU-wide slave labour ban and to promptly implement measures to ensure its practical effectiveness.

Slave labour is an abhorrent practice and should not infest Irish or EU supply chains. Due diligence should be conducted to ensure that any goods imported and consumed in the EU market is not tainted by the use of slave labour. It is essential that work is rewarded with monetary compensation and is not the product of coercion or compulsion. It is unlikely that any goods produced in Xinjiang meet this basic requirement.

18 YFG calls for the prompt publication of the UN High Commissioner's report on the human rights situation in Xinjiang.

There is widespread and strongly supported evidence of grave human rights abuses in Xinjiang, including forced abortions and sterilisations, mass interment, repression of religious freedom, and systematic rape and torture. The gross crimes of the CCP must be exposed to the world and it is disgraceful that the protracted publication process has been subject to evident political pressures. The High Commissioner must release her full report and Ireland should actively campaign to ensure this occurs and that the report is accurate and free from censorship and political influence.

19 YFG calls for the Irish government to support Lithuania in the face of China's economic coercion and support the introduction of an EU anti-coercion mechanism.

Ireland should strongly oppose the efforts by China to intimidate a fellow small nation who has taken a strong stand on freedom and human rights. Ireland should support the European Commission's anti-coercion mechanism and its fast implementation as well as increasing commercial interactions with Lithuania and provide financial support. Further, Ireland should support the EU's efforts at the WTO to highlight the illegality of China's trade restrictions on Lithuania.

20 YFG recommends the continued suspension of Ireland's extradition treaty with Hong Kong

The violation of the Hong Kong Basic Law and the introduction of the national security law have destroyed democracy and rule of law in Hong Kong. As judicial

independence and due process are eradicated, it is inappropriate to extradite any individual to be tried in this jurisdiction. While Beijing uses the legal system to intimidate pro-democracy activities and suppress dissent to its increasingly authoritarian rule in Hong Kong, Ireland should not facilitate in any way this political crackdown masquerading as justice.

21 YFG calls for Ireland to support Taiwan's active participation in international organisations.

Taiwan is a pivotal member of the international community and has much to contribute to helping solve global issues. The impact of its inability to participate fully in international organisations such as the WHO was especially prominent during the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and had inimical effects on the international community's ability to tackle the virus. Ireland should support Taiwan's participation in all international organisations.

22 YFG calls for greater transparency on the operation of Chinese state media in Ireland, with mandatory reporting of Chinese investment into media outlets operating in Ireland.

23 YFG recommends that members of the Oireachtas and their staff, as well as employees of the Garda Síochána, Defence Forces and other organisations tasked with national security should be advised to avoid Chinese manufactured devices as their personal or work mobile phones or other electronic communication to ensure information security and ensure those who handle confidential information or hold positions of authority are not compromised by foreign actors.

24 YFG calls on the Government to examine methods of offering asylum more easily to victims of Chinese state persecution, particularly members of the Uyghur minority in Xinjian and democracy activists in Hong Kong.

www.yfg.ie

Fine Gael National Headquarters, 51 Upper Mount Street, Dublin 2

☎ 01 619 8444 📧 yfg@yfg.ie 🌐 www.yfg.ie

🐦 @yfg 📘 /young.finegael 📷 @youngfinegael 🌐 Young Fine Gael

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