

# MEDIA ANALYSIS: CHINA'S PUBLIC DIPLOMACY IN ALBANIA





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**CHINA'S PUBLIC DIPLOMACY  
IN ALBANIA**

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# I. Introduction

Shifts in power are a key element shaping worldwide political dynamics. The global landscape has been undergoing significant changes, with one of the most noticeable being China's ascent to a position of great influence.<sup>1</sup> The Western Balkans, with its strategic geopolitical location and need for infrastructure investments, has attracted China's attention. The influence of China in the region has grown through initiatives like the 17+1 cooperation mechanism and the One Belt, One Road initiative, the latter aiming to connect China with Europe through infrastructure investments.<sup>2</sup>

The stalling of the European Integration processes for the Western Balkans region has created a vacuum for other actors such as Russia and China to fill. Following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the EU has stepped up its effort towards enlargement.<sup>3</sup> However, the tools that Russia is employing to undermine democratic countries have also provided fertile ground for the corrosive influence of China and other authoritarian powers.<sup>4</sup> The 2022 European Parliament report on China's strategic interests in the Western Balkans highlights China's multifaceted approach, involving not just economic investments but also soft power tactics.<sup>5</sup> In Albania, China has deep historical ties and is currently

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<sup>1</sup> Konrad Adenauer Stiftung. (2021). "Global Power Shifts". Available at <https://www.kas.de/en/web/auslandsinformationen/ausgaben/issues/-/content/global-power-shifts> Accessed 31.03.2023

<sup>2</sup> Vangeli, Anastas (Ed.) (2022). The role of China in Southeast Europe. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, SEE Dialogue. Available at <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/athen/19416.pdf> Accessed 31.03.2023.

<sup>3</sup> "EU courts Western Balkans as Russia and China loom", (2022). Politico. Available at <https://www.politico.eu/article/eu-courts-western-balkans-as-russia-china-shadows-loom/> Accessed 31.03.2023.

<sup>4</sup> Center for the Study of Democracy. (2023). "Breaking the Code: Russian and Chinese Disinformation and Illicit Financial Flows in Southeast Europe", available at <https://csd.bg/publications/publication/breaking-the-code-russian-and-chinese-disinformation-and-illicit-financial-flows-in-southeast-europ/> Accessed 31.03.2023.

<sup>5</sup> European Parliament. (2022). China's strategic interests in the Western Balkans. Available at [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2022/733558/EPRS\\_BRI\(2022\)733558\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2022/733558/EPRS_BRI(2022)733558_EN.pdf) Accessed 31.05.2023.

a key trade partner, with investments in various sectors.<sup>6</sup>

This analysis delves into the main narratives produced by Chinese state-sponsored media outlets operating within Albania, a topic which, despite its increasing relevance, remains understudied. With China's growing economic and political presence worldwide, understanding how it projects its influence and shapes local perceptions becomes crucial. This research is particularly relevant given the rise of China's economic and cultural diplomacy in Albania, the geopolitical dynamics at play<sup>7</sup> and the media's pivotal role in transmitting narratives. However, the process is not without complexities; understanding the narratives constructed by Chinese state-sponsored media is key to analyzing Beijing's influence and intentions.

Media play a vital role in shaping narratives and perceptions. China's increased media presence in Albania, achieved through cooperation agreements with local media outlets and the establishment of branches of Chinese media institutions, has the potential to shape the public perception and discourse about China in the country. This study aims to unravel these narratives by analyzing the content produced by Chinese state-sponsored media in Albania, providing a starting point for insight into the underlying motives, strategies, and potential impacts of China's public diplomacy efforts in the country. It also provides a nuanced understanding of China's role in Albania, crucial for policymakers, researchers and the broader public to comprehend the shifting geopolitical landscape.

This analysis contributes to the broader discussion about China's public diplomacy and its global

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<sup>6</sup> Lami, Roland. (2022) The role of China in Albania. In the Analysis The role of China in Southeast Europe. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, SEE Dialogue, edited by Anastas Vangeli, Available at <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/athen/19416.pdf> Accessed 31.03.2023. pp. 12-16.

<sup>7</sup> European Parliament. (2022). China's strategic interests in the Western Balkans. Available at [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2022/733558/EPRS\\_BRI\(2022\)733558\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2022/733558/EPRS_BRI(2022)733558_EN.pdf) Accessed 31.05.2023.



influence, focused on Albania and the Western Balkans. Through rigorous analysis of media content, this report aims to unravel the complexities of China's influence in Albania and contribute to the academic discourse and inform policy responses.



## China's Role in the Western Balkans

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Since the 2008-2009 global financial crisis, China's influence in the Western Balkans has grown remarkably. Today, regional prospects cannot ignore the relationship with Beijing, in stark contrast to a decade ago.<sup>8</sup> As China's influence grows, it elicits mixed reactions, igniting debates about appropriate foreign policy approaches to handle rising non-Western powers. These discussions have intensified due to global events such as the Covid-19 pandemic and the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which add strategic significance to China's role. Dialogues regarding China often intersect with domestic development and policy issues, further complicated by regional dynamics.<sup>9</sup> China's prominence in agenda-setting has steered the discourse towards economic development. The increased presence of both Russia and China in the Western Balkans represents a long-term challenge for the region and for trans-Atlantic security.<sup>10</sup>

Expectations of economic gains through trade and investment are a major factor shaping China's image in the Western Balkan region. China's presence in the region has also been vastly amplified through local and national media. Overall, the media's coverage of China's economic weight and technological prowess has a strong element of hype, if not outright manipulation. In several cases,

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<sup>8</sup> Friedrich Ebert Stiftung. (2022). The role of China in Southeast Europe., SEE Dialogue, edited by Anastas Vangeli, Available at <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/athen/19416.pdf> Accessed 31.03.2023. p. 10.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. p. 3.

<sup>10</sup> Zeneli, Valbona (2021). "The West, China and Russia in the Western Balkans", available at [https://www.marshallcenter.org/sites/default/files/files/2020-10/pC\\_V10N3\\_en-4\\_Zeneli.pdf](https://www.marshallcenter.org/sites/default/files/files/2020-10/pC_V10N3_en-4_Zeneli.pdf) Accessed 31.03.2023. p. 28

media coverage is uncritical, and content offered by Chinese media is merely recycled by SEE media outlets.<sup>11</sup>

China has intensified its economic presence in the Balkans following the impact of the 2008 world economic crisis in the region, instrumentalizing fatigue felt in Balkan countries with procrastination in the integration process and the continued need for investment in the region.<sup>12</sup> The main factors that have triggered the rise of Chinese investments in the region are the 16+1 cooperation mechanism, established between 16 countries in Central and Eastern Europe plus China, which includes all the Western Balkan countries except Kosovo. This cooperation paved the way for the inclusion of these countries in the “One Belt, One Road” economic initiative that seeks to connect China with Europe through infrastructure investments in nearly 70 countries.<sup>13</sup>

Due to their favorable geographical position, the Western Balkan countries are of interest to Beijing for the development of infrastructure investments and increased influence in the region. Taking advantage of the region’s significant need for investment, China has invested nearly \$32 billion in 136 projects focused on strategic sectors such as energy, road and maritime infrastructure.<sup>14</sup>

Most of these investments have been in Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Greece, with less in North Macedonia and Albania. Chinese economic investments have targeted objects that attract high public visibility, increasing China’s prestige as an actor in the Western Balkans. This strategy

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<sup>11</sup> Tonchev, Plamen., Petkova, Mirela., (2023). China’s hidden influence in South East Europe. Available at <https://www.freiheit.org/sites/default/files/2023-01/2022-fnf-policy-paper-hidden-influence-final.pdf> Accessed 31.03.2023. p.8.

<sup>12</sup> European Parliament. (2022). China’s strategic interests in the Western Balkans. Available at [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2022/733558/EPRS\\_BRI\(2022\)733558\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2022/733558/EPRS_BRI(2022)733558_EN.pdf) Accessed 31.05.2023.

<sup>13</sup> Vulović, Marina. (2023). “Western Balkan Foreign and Security Ties with External Actors”. Available at [https://www.swp-berlin.org/publications/products/comments/2023C08\\_WesternBalkanTies\\_Web.pdf](https://www.swp-berlin.org/publications/products/comments/2023C08_WesternBalkanTies_Web.pdf) Accessed 31.05.2023.

<sup>14</sup> More here <https://china.balkaninsight.com/>

is combined with an intensive campaign of cultural diplomacy and interaction with political elites through exchanges and political forums.<sup>15</sup> What is concerning, however, is that Chinese investment loans negatively affect the European integration process of the Western Balkan countries, as these loans risk creating economic dependence on China, lowering environmental standards, and perpetuating corrupt policies.<sup>16</sup>



## China's Role in Albania

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The recent history of Albania-China relations dates to the Cold War period. After Albania broke with the Soviet Union, China was Albania's only partner until Albania broke diplomatic ties in 1978, which plunged the country into total isolation. The partnership with the People's Republic of China accommodated the Albania's need for economic and technical support. For China, Albania was a way to amplify criticism against the Soviet Union and its demands in the United Nations, as in the case of the Resolution filed by Albania on the recognition of the People's Republic of China as the legitimate government of China. Since the fall of communism, Sino-Albanian bilateral relations have intensified, especially since 2013, a period which coincides with the creation of the 16+1 economic initiative with China and the countries of Eastern and Central Europe, of which Albania is also a part.<sup>17</sup>

In economic terms, China is Albania's third main trading partner and supplies 8.9 per cent of the

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<sup>15</sup> Shopov, Vladimir. (2021). "Decade of patience: How China became a power in the Western Balkans", available at <https://ecfr.eu/publication/decade-of-patience-how-china-became-a-power-in-the-western-balkans/#an-ecosystem-of-shared-interests> Accessed 31.05.2023.

<sup>16</sup> Doehler, Austin., (2019). "How China Challenges the EU in the Western Balkans", available at <https://thedi diplomat.com/2019/09/how-china-challenges-the-eu-in-the-western-balkans/> Accessed 31.05.2023.

<sup>17</sup> More information <http://al.china-embassy.gov.cn/eng/zagx/sbgx/>

country's total imports. According to a study conducted by BIRN in 2021 on Chinese investments in the Balkans, eight projects with Chinese investment have been developed in Albania worth some 649,859,803 euros. The projects are in the mining and fuel sectors, infrastructural as well as cultural and humanitarian sectors.<sup>18</sup> The presence of Chinese investments was most visible in 2016, when the company China Everbright Group secured the concession for Tirana's main Nënë Tereza/ Mother Teresa International Airport. The concession was expected to last until 2027 but the Chinese company sold 100 per cent of its stake in 2020.<sup>19</sup> In 2016, the Chinese firm Geo-Jade Petroleum also acquired all the shares of American Canadian Bankers Petroleum in Patos-Marinza, the largest onshore oil field in Europe.<sup>20</sup>

Regarding the media and cultural field, according to a report by Germany's Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, China has increased its media and cultural presence in Albania.<sup>21</sup> In 2012, there were indications of growing cooperation between the Albanian Telegraphic Agency and the Xinhua News Agency<sup>22</sup>, while in 2013 a branch of China Radio International FM<sup>23</sup> was established in Albania, as an affiliate of the Confucius Institute at the University of Tirana.<sup>24</sup>

In addition, in 2019, Albanian Radio Television signed a memorandum of collaboration with Xinhua News Agency, which envisaged the dissemination of media content such as movies, documentaries,

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<sup>18</sup> More information <https://china.balkaninsight.com/>

<sup>19</sup> More information <https://www.monitor.al/sipermarrjet-qe-shiten-dhe-blene-aksione/>

<sup>20</sup> Rapoza, Kenneth., (2016). "Albania Becomes Latest China Magnet", available <https://www.forbes.com/sites/kenrapoza/2016/06/13/albania-becomes-latest-china-magnet/?sh=1049b9d62490> Accessed 31.05.2023.

<sup>21</sup> Shopov, Vladimir. (2020). "Getting on the radar – China's rising media presence in South East Europe", available at <https://www.kas.de/documents/281902/281951/%E2%80%9CChina%E2%80%99s+Rising+Media+Presence+in+South+East+Europe%E2%80%9D.pdf/0beb5c40-b6dd-7292-5cc3-fd8a5c1be824?version=1.1&t=1607417514942> Accessed 31.05.2023.

<sup>22</sup> More information <https://albanian.cri.cn/321/2012/09/20/61s117718.htm>

<sup>23</sup> See <https://albanian.cri.cn/index.htm>

<sup>24</sup> See <https://ciut.edu.al/>

cartoons, and joint staff training. This agreement paved the way for the broadcast of documentaries on China's political system, such as *China: Time of Xi*.<sup>25</sup> Following the signing of this agreement, during 2020-2022, Albanian Radio Television published 208 articles sourced from Xinhua News Agency. In general, the news covered science and culture more than politics. A study in 2020 counted more than 1,000 China-related articles published in the country over five years. Nearly half of these, 47 per cent, portrayed China in a positive light, 38 per cent were more negative and 15 per cent were deemed neutral.<sup>26</sup>

Despite this, China's economic and media presence in the Albanian context remains limited. According to experts, the achievements of the 16+1 initiative are also modest, while its economic impact in Albania is almost non-existent.<sup>27</sup> The limited impact of Chinese investments is related to the failure to complete a number of major projects, such as the Blue Corridor, an eight-country project for a coastal highway running from Slovenia to Greece via Albania, or the withdrawal of the Chinese company from the Arbri Highway concession linking Albania to North Macedonia.<sup>28</sup> Another influencing factor includes the reluctance of the Albanian government to build up large debts to China, as in the case of Arbri Highway,<sup>29</sup> as well as the increased economic and political investment of the US in Albania.

China's increased presence in the region has prompted the US to re-focus on the Western Balkans and especially on Albania, since the latter was the first state in the region to line up with the Clean Network Initiative undertaken by then President Donald Trump in 2020 to challenge the dominance

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<sup>25</sup> More information [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/europe/2019-10/20/c\\_138487215.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/europe/2019-10/20/c_138487215.htm)

<sup>26</sup> Feta, Bledar. (2022). "Chinese Influence in Albania", available at [https://cepa.org/comprehensive-reports/chinese-influence-in-albania/#footnote\\_9\\_1152](https://cepa.org/comprehensive-reports/chinese-influence-in-albania/#footnote_9_1152) Accessed 31.05.2023.

<sup>27</sup> See <https://www.zeramerikes.com/a/5613888.html>

<sup>28</sup> See <https://ecfr.eu/special/china-balkans/albania/>

<sup>29</sup> BIRN. (2020). China in the Western Balkans. Available at <https://consultancy.birn.eu.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/China-in-the-Western-Balkans-April-2020.pdf> Accessed 31.05.2023.

of Chinese firms in 5G mobile technology.<sup>30</sup> During the same year, the US and Albania signed an agreement that paved the way for energy investments in the Skavica Hydropower Plant and the Vlora Thermal Power Station, as a response to Chinese energy investments.<sup>31</sup>

China's image in Albania is shaped by the historical context, trade relations and China's diplomatic stance on key policy issues. The Albanian Security Barometer 2020, published by the Center for the Study of Democracy and Governance, CSGD, an Albanian think tank, reveals that in 2020, 54.9 per cent of respondents saw China's influence on Albania's security as positive. Although these figures showed improvements from the previous year (2019), the explosion of the Covid-19 pandemic may have eroded such support, despite China's supply of large quantities of vaccines to Albania in 2019. On the other hand, China's long-standing and firm diplomatic stance against recognition of Kosovo's independence influences the unfavorable views of China held by many Albanians.<sup>32</sup>



## Methodological Note

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In order to monitor China's public diplomacy in Albania through its state-sponsored media outlets, for the purpose of this analysis, a random sample of articles published by China Radio International,

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<sup>30</sup> Foreign Policy. (2022). "Albania Is a New Belt and Road Battleground", available at <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/01/24/albania-china-bri-us-europe-geopolitics/> Accessed 31.05.2023.

<sup>31</sup> Foreign Policy. (2022). "Albania Is a New Belt and Road Battleground", available at <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/01/24/albania-china-bri-us-europe-geopolitics/> Accessed 31.05.2023.

<sup>32</sup> Tonchev, Plamen., Petkova, Mirela., (2023). China's hidden influence in South East Europe. Available at <https://www.freiheit.org/sites/default/files/2023-01/2022-fnf-policy-paper-hidden-influence-final.pdf> Accessed 31.03.2023. p. 10.

CRI, in Albanian in the period 22 August 2021 to 21 August 2022 was scraped and qualitatively analysed.

The articles were scraped from CRI using SentiOne, an AI-powered online listening and analytics tool. A random sample of 20 per cent of the articles published by CRI over 12 months was scraped and coded to identify the main themes and messages.

After being categorized and labeled in an Excel database based on top-level themes, the articles were qualitatively analysed to understand the messaging of Chinese state-sponsored media in Albanian based on specific categories.

Apart from the top-level themes that were identified, an analysis of the articles based on themes of interest listed below was carried out to get a more in-depth understanding of China's messaging on specific topics, including coverage on: The European Union; NATO; Balkan countries; Russia's invasion of Ukraine; Human Rights; and The Belt and Road Initiative.

To gain insight into the audience that CRI reaches through its Albanian-language channels in social media, analysis of the engagement of the posts of CRI's social media channels was conducted for the period August 2021 to August 2022 using the Meta-owned application Crowdtangle.

## II. Findings

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During the 12-month period of 22 August 2021 to 21 August 2022, Radio China International (CRI) published approximately 5,200 articles through its Albanian-language service.<sup>33</sup> Due to the large amount of data, the researchers run the content analysis on 20 per cent (n=1,060) of the articles published by CRI during the period under analysis.



### Key themes covered by CRI in Albanian language

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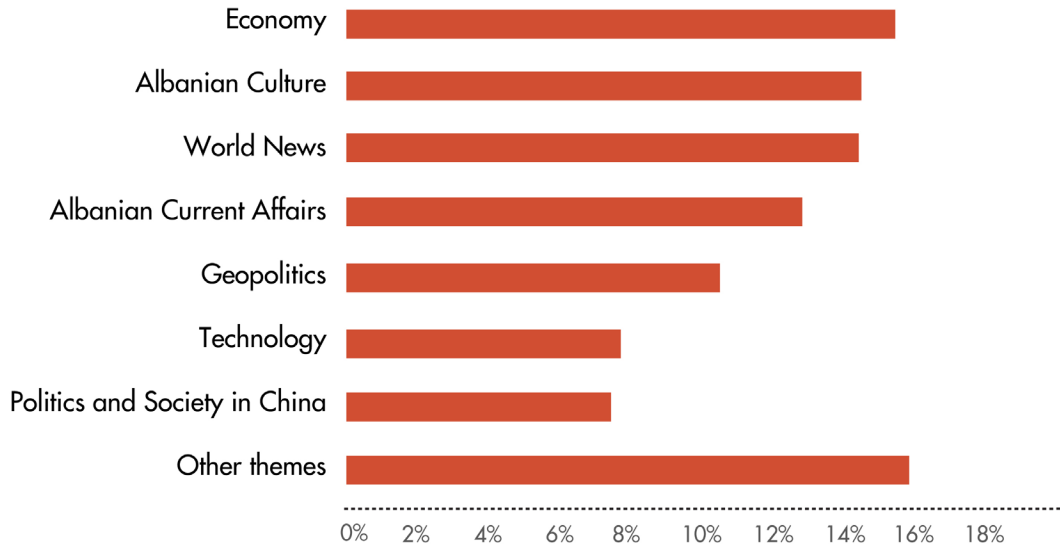
Through qualitative analysis, the most recurrent themes covered by the articles published by CRI in Albanian are: Economy, Albanian Culture, World News, Albanian Current Affairs, Geopolitics, Technology, and Politics and Society in China. These themes accounted for 84 per cent of all articles published. The rest covered other topics such as COVID-19, Chinese Culture, the Environment, Human Rights and Security.

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<sup>33</sup> <https://albanian.cri.cn/>



## SHARE OF KEY THEMES COVERED BY CRI IN ALBANIAN LANGUAGE



The main narratives identified from the qualitative analysis of the articles published under each key theme covered by the Albanian service of CRI are summarized below.

### **Economy**

Economy was the most popular top-level theme in CRI's output in Albanian, comprising 15.85 per

cent of the total articles in the sample taken in analysis. This theme includes articles that cover the progress of various economic sectors in China, placing a special emphasis on the “One Belt, One Road” (OBOR) initiative. Achievements under this initiative are mostly highlighted and criticism of the OBOR is attacked as baseless. Chinese regions criticized by the US over the forced labor of the Uyghur minority are portrayed as experiencing strong economic development. Under this theme are also articles published on the production and consumption of goods in China, e-commerce, finance, taxation, marketing and advertising, transport infrastructure, trade, energy, mining, agriculture and industry.

In the sample of articles, China is pictured as a country enjoying rapid economic growth compared to other countries (US, Japan, EU countries), which are suffering recession. Chinese messaging in this theme claims that Beijing was able to respond in real time to the Covid-19 pandemic. It also claims that the measures undertaken by China to deal with the energy crisis are not only effective but also innovative and environmentally friendly. China is described as a strong promoter of sustainable development goals, especially regarding poverty reduction, waste management and environmental protection.

### Examples of headlines:

*“Investments in transport increased by 6.7 % in the first half of the year.”*

*“China’s Xinjiang registers sustainable growth of industry in the first half of the year.”*

### **Albanian Current Affairs and Culture**

In the sample of 1,060 articles, 293 articles covered news on Albania (themes of Current Affairs / Albanian Culture), comprising 27.6 per cent of the total article sample published by CRI in

Albanian during the 12 months ending in August 2022.

The majority of stories concerning Albanian Culture include human interest stories on Albanian sports and music stars, at home and in the diaspora. Current Affairs coverage includes stories on the Albanian economy, politics and society, as well as international relations. The tone of this coverage is neutral, sourced by the statements of public officials/cabinet ministers or reporting from Albanian Public Service Media, RTSH. The latter signed a memorandum of cooperation in 2019 with CRI on an exchange of content. RTSH is referenced as a source 43 times, or around 15 per cent of the articles under this category.

### Examples of headlines:

*"Sunny Hill Festival in Tirana, Rama: The nights of the capital will shine."*

*"Champion Luzia Gega honored with medal."*

### World News

World News accounts for 14.6 per cent of the total number of articles and is the theme with the highest level of bias in the sample of articles analysed by this research. This theme includes news on global current affairs, mainly from the United States, Japan, Southeast Asian countries, Iran, Russia, India, and Africa. Almost all the news articles on the US are critical and convey messages about the failures of the US government to handle the Covid-19 pandemic, faltering trust in democratic institutions, economic recession, increased crime rates and other negative phenomena.

Similarly, articles on Japan, another strategic competitor to China, portray an economy in decline. In the European context, news about economic recession, labor strikes and increased costs of living

prevail. News published under this theme on African countries point to China's positive contribution to the continent.

### Examples of headlines:

*"The failure of US climate policies."*

*"Poll: Americans' trust in government officials declining."*

### Geopolitics

Articles with messaging on Geopolitics account for 10.6 per cent of the total posts made by CRI. These articles mainly cover events and people that structure China's relationship with its neighbors and the wider world. China's relationship with Taiwan and its claim to the island occupy a central theme in this group of articles. Of a total of 115 articles under this theme, 24 relate to Taiwan. The articles present the "One China" principle toward Taiwan and in particular denounce the visit of the former speaker of the US House of Representatives, Nancy Pelosi, to the island. Pelosi visited Taiwan on August 2, 2022, with five Democratic Party members of the US House of Representatives, for a two-day trip as part of her Asia tour. Although the Biden administration discouraged Pelosi's visit to Taiwan, it did not prevent it. The visit was condemned by China with harsh messaging appearing in its state-sponsored media outlets, including on CRI's Albanian-language publication. CRI devoted nine stories to Pelosi's visit. Chinese officials warned in these stories that the visit was provocative and a breach of China's sovereignty, and also warned other countries not to follow in US footsteps. The stories published by CRI also cover China diplomatic and military reaction to the visit to Taiwan.

## Examples of headlines:

*"China announces counter-measures to Pelosi's visit to Taiwan."*

*"Kenyan president: Roads built by China promote economic development."*

## Technology

There are 83 articles in the sample taken under analysis, nearly 8 per cent of the total amount of articles in the sample, related to the theme of Technology. These articles cover messaging on specific technologies like electric cars, smart phones produced in China, energy projects, information technology infrastructure, 5G telecommunication data transfer technology, space exploration or articles on products and services of major Chinese corporations or well-known brands like Xiaomi and Huawei.

## Examples of headlines:

*"Ministry: Chinas has 475 million 5G users."*

*"New quantic Chinese satellite launched."*

## Politics and Society in China

A total of 80 articles were under this theme in the sample that was reviewed, or 7.5 per cent of the total. The messaging under these themes relates to declarations made by Chinese officials – President Xi Jinping and others – on many aspects, including economic development, globalization, education, innovation, transportation and agriculture.



## Other Selected Themes

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Apart from identifying and analysing the top-level themes of the articles published by CRI in Albanian, the researchers also analysed the content of news under selected themes of interests, including articles on Human Rights, the European Union, NATO, Balkan Countries, the Belt and Road economic initiative and the Russian Invasion of Ukraine. These themes of interest were selected based on the literature review of reports on Chinas' global influence campaigns, stability and security in the region and its democratic aspirations.



### Human Rights

From the total sample of articles under review, 15 were classified under the theme of Human Rights. The messaging of these articles focused on the right of minorities in China, claiming that they are well respected, and that criticism of Beijing, often by the United States, is baseless. This includes Western criticism of China's human rights record in Xinjiang and Tibet. Xinjiang is autonomous region of northeast China populated by Uighurs, a Muslim Turkic-speaking ethnic group. According to the annual US State Department report on human rights and texts adopted by the [European Parliament](#), Beijing is responsible for serious human rights abuses in Xingjian, including mass deportation, political indoctrination, family separation, restrictions on religious freedom, cultural destruction and the extensive use of surveillance.

### Quote from article:

*“From the string of endless slanders about human rights in the People’s Republic of China, and especially in the Xinjiang-Uyghur Autonomous Region that lies in the northwestern part of this great Asian country, fvarious US institutions are spreading fictions with hysterical zeal, especially in these last months through their propaganda tools or even the statements of their top policy makers, on their own or through the activities of the closed alliances headed by it; it seems clear that Washington has lost the thread of logic of a large normal and serious state, returning to the old line of behavior as an ‘international gendarme’ towards all the peoples of the world that it considers ‘unfriendly’.”*

### NATO

In the sample of articles published by CRI, four articles were on NATO, the bedrock of the military alliance between Western Europe and the United states. The main focus was NATO’s expansion, with two new countries applying to join after Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. The applications of Sweden and Finland to join the alliance have been blocked by Turkey, which is also the focus of the articles.

The messaging from Chinese state-sponsored media is that the inclusion of Finland and Sweden in NATO would create instability in the security infrastructure in Europe. The stories claim that by abandoning their neutrality, these two countries breached balances that were already established

between military and geopolitical blocs.

### Examples of headlines:

*"Turkey holds reserves on Nordic countries NATO offer."*

Quote from article:

*"The allegations of the head of NATO, Stoltenberg on China's stance on the war in Ukraine are a 'storm in a teacup'."*

### Balkan Countries

Eight stories in the sample taken in the analysis focus on Balkan countries other than Albania. The countries include Greece, Bulgaria and Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia. The selected articles underline the growing presence and influence of China in the region. China is portrayed as reliable and trusted partner, responding to the needs of the region. The articles focus on cooperation between Greece and China but also on the strengthening of ties between Beijing and other countries in the region.

### Example of headline

*"China and Greece agree to strengthen further mutually beneficial cooperation."*

### European Union

The EU is the focus of five articles published by CRI in Albanian in the sample taken under review.



They focus mainly on Europe’s interdependence with the United States, and how the union should break free from Washington’s influence in its security policies. The narrative on the EU is mainly drawn in the context of tensions between China and the United States on two key issues: The first being the visit of the former US House of Representatives speaker Pelosi to Taiwan and the “One China” principle. The second relates to the EU’s stance toward Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. China attacks what it called the EU’s ambiguity on the “One China” policy toward Taiwan during Pelosi’s visit to the island. The messaging from CRI also claims that the US is not interested in peace in Ukraine and is undermining Europe’s strategic independence.

**Example of headline:**

*“CMG: Europe should take its security in its own hands.”*

**The Belt and Road Initiative**

The sample of articles reviewed included 10 new pieces that focused on the Belt and Road initiative. The initiative is a development strategy adopted by the Chinese government in 2013 to invest in hundreds of countries in order to improve the infrastructure that brings Chinese goods to Western markets. The initiative is considered the centerpiece of China’s foreign policy under President Xi Jinping, under his strategy of “Major Country Diplomacy”, which calls on China to assume a greater role in accordance with its rising power status. The stories published by CRI focus on the success of the initiative to boost trade and China’s standing on the world stage.

**Example of headline:**

*“Belt and Road initiative is strong and many good news are expected.”*



## Russia's invasion of Ukraine

In the article sample from CRI, 11 news items focus on Russia's aggression in Ukraine. In these articles, the messaging from Beijing is that China supports the establishment of dialogue between Kyiv and Moscow to find a solution to the conflict. However, despite posturing for peace, China does not support Western sanctions against Russia and insists they will damage the global economy. The news items cover statements on the conflict from Russian President Vladimir Putin and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, but also from countries including Turkey, China and Brazil, where acts of cooperation between the warring factions are encouraged.



## China's audience in Albania

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Apart from publishing in its online page, from 2013, CRI also began broadcasting through Radio Ejani, through the frequency FM106MHz in the region of Tirana and Durres. Due to a lack of official or commercially available data on audience share of radio stations and the readership of online media in Albania, the analysis made use of data on the interaction with followers of its social media channel on Facebook.

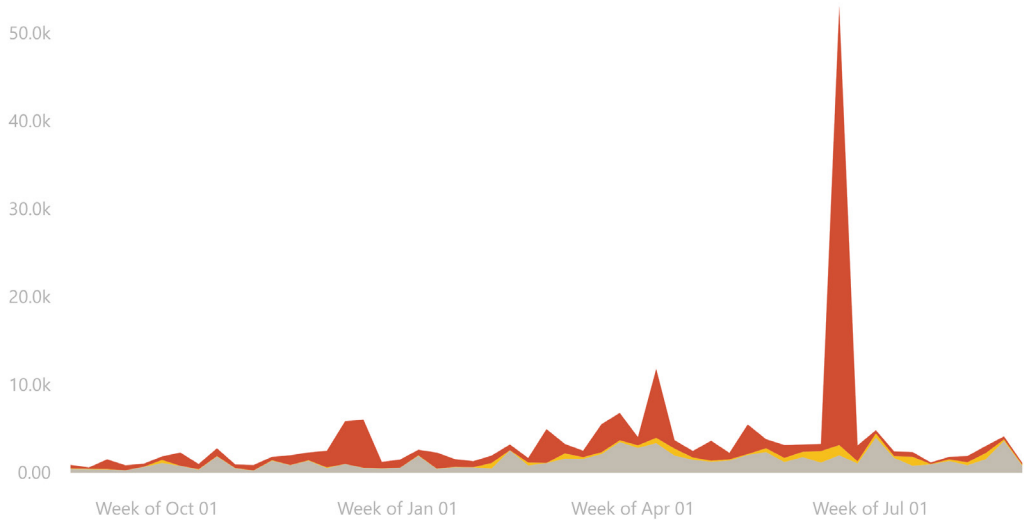
In the 12 months from 22 August 2021 to 21 August 2022, CRI in Albanian made 9,333 posts on its Facebook page and registered a total number of 152,660 interactions. Roughly 51 per cent of these posts were photos, 21 per cent were domestic videos and 28 per cent were links to articles on the website.

The majority of interactions were generated by posts in the form of photos, with 47 per cent of the total interactions, followed by native videos, with 44 per cent. Only 9 per cent of interactions went

to links for articles shared on Facebook. The videos posted by CRI's Albanian-language channel received a total of 18.1 million views.

China's other channel on social media in Albanian is the Facebook page of the Chinese embassy in Tirana. The embassy's page made a total of 294 posts, including links to articles, photos and videos, in the period under review, from August 2021 to August 2022. These posts received 3,241 interactions with 8.5 million views on video posts.

### TOTAL INTERACTIONS



### III. Conclusion and recommendations

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Based on the extensive analysis of China Radio International's Albanian-language content, several key insights can be summarized:

- **Albanian Coverage:** The content of articles covering Albania, both in terms of its culture and current affairs, was largely neutral. It shows the significant interest of China in Albania.
- **Economic Narrative:** CRI portrayed China as a fast-growing, innovative and resilient economy, often contrasting it favorably to the US, Japan and EU countries.
- **World News Bias:** There was a clear bias in global news coverage, with a critical focus on the US, Japan and Europe, whereas African nations were portrayed in a more positive light due to China's growing influence there.
- **Geopolitical Positioning:** Coverage of geopolitics centered heavily on China's relationship with Taiwan, painting a negative picture of US involvement in the region. Other areas covered included regional disputes and international relations.
- **Technology & Society:** China's technological progress and the views of its leadership on various societal aspects were a recurring theme in the articles.
- **NATO, Balkans, EU:** China's coverage of NATO centered around its expansion, projecting a narrative of instability. The Balkan countries were portrayed as having a positive and growing relationship with China. Coverage of the EU was aimed at sowing discord between the EU and the US.
- **Belt and Road Initiative:** Articles portrayed the Belt and Road Initiative as a successful strategy that boosts trade and China's global influence.
- **Human Rights:** Articles on human rights attempted to reject Western criticism and claimed China respected minority rights, particularly in Xinjiang and Tibet.
- **Russia's Invasion of Ukraine:** China's position on the conflict was depicted as neutral, favoring

dialogue over sanctions.

- Audience Engagement: The most engaging posts on CRI's social media channels in Albanian were those featuring photos and native videos. The number of interactions on these platforms indicates a sizeable audience in Albania.

The analysis demonstrates that CRI's Albanian-language outlets serve as a tool for China's public diplomacy in Albania, aiming to shape public opinion in favor of China. It also reveals China's geopolitical, economic and societal interests and strategy for global influence.

Based on the findings, the following recommendations can be made:

- Promote Media and Information Literacy: Educate the Albanian population about the nature and objectives of foreign state-sponsored media outlets. This includes understanding the role these media play in shaping narratives to serve their sponsoring government's interests.
- Diversify News Sources: Encourage Albanians to access a diverse range of news sources, including independent media and outlets from various countries to get a more balanced view of global events.
- Enhance Local Media: Support Albanian media outlets to produce high-quality content that is engaging and can compete with foreign outlets. This will reduce the dependence on foreign media for news and information.
- Fact-checking Initiatives: Strengthen existing initiatives to fact-check articles, especially those from state-sponsored outlets, to ensure the accuracy of the information being disseminated.
- Transparency in Cooperation: If local media outlets cooperate with foreign state-sponsored outlets like CRI, transparency should be maintained about the nature of their relationship and the content shared.
- Monitor Foreign Media Influence: Continue to monitor and analyze the content of foreign state-sponsored media to understand their messaging strategies, themes, and potential influence on public opinion.

- **Public Diplomacy Efforts:** Strengthen Albania's public diplomacy efforts to effectively communicate its stance on national and international issues, countering potential influence from foreign state-sponsored media.
- **Address Human Rights Narratives:** Engage in open discussions about human rights concerns in China and elsewhere, ensuring that Albanians have access to objective information on these critical issues.
- **Respond to Disinformation:** Develop effective strategies to respond to potential disinformation campaigns, ensuring the public is informed and can critically evaluate the information they consume.



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MEDIA ANALYSIS:  
**CHINA'S PUBLIC DIPLOMACY  
IN ALBANIA**



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