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**CHINESE SOFT POWER FRAMES IN THE RHETORIC OF LITHUANIAN
PUBLIC FIGURES**

MASTER'S THESIS

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Summary: this research analyses the rhetoric of Lithuanian politicians and public figures on China-related topics in the period from the release of The National Threat Assessment 2019 until November 2022 inclusive. The problem of the research is rooted in the struggle to understand what influences the ambiguous opinion in Lithuanian society towards questions related to China. The research is a qualitative inductive content analysis which was performed using the Chinese soft power concept, based on soft power theory.

CONFIRMATION

I confirm that I am the author of submitted master's thesis: *Chinese Soft Power Frames in the Rhetoric of Lithuanian Public Figures*, which has been prepared independently and has never been presented for any other course or used in another educational institution, neither in Lithuania, or abroad. I also provide a full bibliographical list which indicates all the sources that were used to prepare this assignment and contains no un-used sources.

Justas Valantinas

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Introduction

In early 2000s the Chinese officials recognised that miscalculations of China's utilization of "hard power" regarding state security issues such as territorial disputes in South China Sea and unsuccessful attempts to attract regional partners, which historically have been the allies of the United States, have backfired and dissociated away the countries across the region which made China more vulnerable. Beijing re-evaluated its foreign policy and understood that the image of the country had to change in order to ensure that the internal and external objectives could be accomplished. That meant employing and emphasizing the soft power approach in the country's grand strategy. Therefore, Chinese leadership set out new goals in order to change the image of the country, which were developed under the new strategic policy labelled under the slogan of "Peaceful Rise" (later re-labelled as "Peaceful Development"). China's Foreign Ministry announced that the country will be "safeguarding peace, promoting development and enhancing cooperation, which is the common desire of all peoples, represents the irresistible historical trend".¹ In other words, Beijing started to invest into its soft power by projecting a message that other nations will benefit from China's rising power and influence and China will not pose any threat. However, it must be mentioned, that the new strategic policy did not introduce a complex soft power toolkit for the execution and could be understood as a campaign of reassurance for other political actors, nervous of China's extraordinary growth.²

In 2013 the Chinese government introduced a contemporary foreign policy concept, known as "Major Country Diplomacy". Less than 100 days after Xi Jinping assumed the presidency of China it was announced that "the world is going through a deep crisis of thinking and culture in modern civilization and that China hopes to promote, through diplomacy, the Chinese culture, contribute Chinese wisdom to the handling of international relations, share China's governance experience and offer Chinese solution to improve global governance".³ The initiation of "Major Country Diplomacy" idea meant that China's soft power approach was on a course of a revamp – Xi Jinping has elevated the significance of soft power for both domestic and international contexts in order to achieve a goal of elevating the country's power and global status and also enhancing the communication of China's story. In order to reach that goal, Beijing has widely adopted its soft power toolkit, which includes incorporation of foreign policy mechanisms and economic statecraft

¹ Joshua Kurlantzick "Charm Offensive: How China's Soft Power is Transforming the World?" 2007, p. 37.

² Robert L. Suettinger "The Rise and Descent of Peaceful Rise". 2004, p. 7.

³ Stephen N. Smith "China's Major Country Diplomacy: Legitimation and Foreign Policy Change". 2021, p. 6.

as well as promotion of its cultural and socio-economic resources and projection of its positions on world issues.⁴

China's proactive approach of developing soft power tailored to different world regions was seen through the means of its economic prowess, image shaping and promotion of the culture.⁵ It could be argued that this strategy has influenced preferences of various countries, which was seen through a lens of more intense dynamic of bilateral relations. Regarding China's projection of soft power an example of Sino-Lithuanian relations stands out. At the beginning of the last decade, the prospect of bilateral cooperation between Lithuania and China seemed bright and promising. Since then, there was no shortage of mutual contacts with an objective to raise the partnership to a higher level, so arguably China's soft power toolkit was received rather positively. It is apparent that Lithuania did see significant potential in China's global infrastructure development strategy, at that time called One Belt, One Road (today known as Belt and Road Initiative) as well as in the Chinese market and its opportunities for Lithuanian exporters and investors. The previous governments, during the tenure of Prime Ministers Algirdas Butkevičius and Saulius Skvernelis, actively pursued Chinese investments and bilateral agreements, through bilateral and multinational formats, to enhance economic and cultural relations with China. The interest from a Baltic state was illustrated by the country's self-designation as a logistical gateway into Europe – Lithuania did push its strategic advantages to become the main regional hub for Chinese goods.⁶ Enthusiasm was also voiced by state officials, who might not have expressed a China-friendly outlook. The Lithuanian president at the time, Dalia Grybauskaitė, who attracted negative attention of Beijing in 2013, due to her meeting with the spiritual leader of Tibet, Dalai Lama, notably expressed contentment regarding Sino-Lithuanian relations after visiting the China International Import Expo in 2018, and encouraged Lithuanian businesses to benefit from the more accessible Chinese market. Also, the public opinion in Lithuania on the most populous country in the world was generally positive – a survey published in 2019 showed that 45% of respondents had a favourable opinion of China, while 33% unfavourable.⁷

However, it could be considered that the Chinese soft power approach did not reach its objectives. Since 2019, there has been a significant change in Lithuania's foreign policy towards the People's Republic of China, with the Baltic country not shying away from escalating human rights issues, with the most prominent example being the parliamentary adoption of the resolution on

⁴ Muhammad Nadeem Mirza, Husain Abbas, Muhammad Qasim Nizamani „Evaluating China's Soft Power Discourse: Assumptions, Strategies and Objectives“. 2020. p. 5.

⁵ European Think-tank Network on China “China's Soft Power in Europe – Falling on Hard Times“ 2021, p. 3.

⁶ Konstantinas Andrijauskas “Sino-Lithuanian Relations in 2020: Shedding the Masks?”. 2020. p. 8.

⁷ Laura Silver, Kat Devlin, Christine Huang “China's Economic Growth Mostly Welcomed in Emerging Markets, but Neighbors Wary of Its Influence”. 2019. p. 27.

“China’s Mass, Systematic and Gross Violation of Human Rights and Genocide Against Uyghurs”, which was labelled as an interference in China’s domestic affairs by Beijing. Also, it must be mentioned that since the year of 2019, the State Security Department of Lithuania continuously identifies China’s core interests and methods of action in its “National Threat Assessment” reports. However, the most notable event marking the decline of bilateral relations was the opening of a “Taiwanese Representative Office in Lithuania”, which notably uses the adjective “Taiwanese”, that allegedly interferes with Beijing’s “One-China Principle”.⁸ Also, a public opinion poll conducted in the second quarter of 2022 showed that Lithuanians held negative views towards China – 62% of respondents viewed China negatively and only 25% positively.⁹

Despite notable state security threats and human rights concerns, the opinion on Sino-Lithuanian question is not unambiguous, since the chosen foreign policy path is fiercely criticised by various political forces and public figures. A survey commissioned by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania showed, that only 13% of respondents answered that they support Lithuania’s policy on China, while 60% had a negative opinion.¹⁰ An interesting collision of public perception towards China is apparent in the society – although the views towards China have evidently plummeted, the majority of Lithuanian society is clearly holding unsatisfactory views towards a review of Lithuania’s bilateral relationship with China conducted by the new government, despite the risks and threats of Chinese activities identified by state security or human rights concerns escalated by the local politicians. The collision of the executive power and Lithuanian society and ambiguous perception of China-related issues in Lithuanian society raises questions about how China is perceived in Lithuania and what determines such a different approach to the strategy towards Beijing. Present circumstances increase a necessity of analysing certain peculiarities of the Chinese soft power projection in the Baltic country. As mentioned before, it could be argued that Chinese soft power projection did not achieve its goals in the Baltic state, because of the revision of bilateral relations and decline of China’s perception in Lithuanian society, although disapproving attitude held by majority of Lithuanians towards the government’s strategy regarding Beijing indicate that certain narratives are still shaping the sentiment of China in Lithuania. It is essential to investigate what is communicated by local politicians and what assessments or opinions regarding China that could positively influence the society’s outlook on China are carried in their rhetoric. Therefore, the main question that this master’s thesis will seek to answer is – what are the Chinese

⁸ Statement by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. 2021.

https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjbxw/202111/t20211121_10451002.html

⁹ “Eurobarometer. EP Spring 2022 Survey”. 2022. <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2792>

¹⁰ “URM apklausa: geriausi santykiai su Latvija, Estija, JAV, Vokietija, Ukraina, Lenkija, o pagrindinis saugumo garantas – NATO“. 2022. <https://urm.lt/default/lt/naujienos/urm-apklausa-geriausi-santykiai-su-latvija-estija-jav-vokietija-ukraina-lenkija-o-pagrindinis-saugumo-garantasnato>

soft power frames in the rhetoric of Lithuanian politicians and public figures, and how are they expressed?

The topic of the Chinese soft power in Lithuania is not thoroughly researched in the academic literature. Certain aspects of Chinese soft power were described or analysed, although there is a lack of studies in this field. Therefore, the chosen study will add new insights to the complex and multifaceted issue of Chinese soft power in Lithuania by revealing what respective frames are abundant in the rhetoric of various politicians and public figures.

Research problem: the problem of the research is rooted in the struggle to understand what influences the ambiguous opinion in Lithuanian society towards questions related to China. Although it could be argued that Chinese soft power projection in Lithuania has failed, since the Sino-Lithuanian relations and public perception of China have significantly declined, the majority of Lithuanian society has a negative opinion towards Lithuania's foreign policy on China. The approach of analysis of the rhetoric coming from Lithuanian politicians and public figures provides a unique perspective of exploring what could, to a certain extent, be influencing Lithuanian society.

The goal of the research is to identify the Chinese soft power frames in the assessments and opinions of Lithuanian politicians and public figures, and to analyse how they are expressed.

Research object: rhetoric of Lithuanian politicians and public figures on the topic of China from the release of The National Threat Assessment 2019 until 2022 November inclusive.

Research aims:

- 1) to discuss the degree of research on Chinese soft power projection in Lithuania in the academic literature;
- 2) to provide a theoretical background of soft power and framing, particularly applicable to the case of Chinese soft power;
- 3) to identify the politicians and public figures, who have expressed Chinese soft power aspects in their rhetoric, and to investigate the rhetoric of selected individuals on China-related topics based on qualitative content analysis;
- 4) to define frames of Chinese soft power evident in the rhetoric of identified politicians and public figures;

5) to present the findings of an analysis of the rhetoric of Lithuanian politicians and public figures by assessing the detected Chinese soft power frames.

The thesis is divided into four chapters: theoretical background, literature review, methodology and analysis. Foremost, the theoretical background of soft power theory and framing theory will be introduced as well as the main aspects of Chinese soft power will be discussed. In the second chapter the readings and research on the topic of Chinese soft power projection in Lithuania will be presented. Furthermore, the methodology of the thesis will be described, outlining the main information about the research, the selection of data and the method of data analysis. Afterwards, in the empirical part the rhetoric of selected Lithuanian politicians and public figures will be analysed using the qualitative content analysis method. Subsequently, the identified Chinese soft power frames will be defined and assessed. Finally, in the conclusion the corresponding conclusions will be presented.

1. Theoretical background

1.1. Soft power theory

The “soft power” term was introduced by a well-known political scientist Joseph S. Nye, who expanded the international relations theory of liberalism and, together with another prominent academic Robert O. Keohane, co-founded the theory of neoliberalism. One of the revolutionary introductions for a liberal international relations theory by J. S. Nye is the aforementioned term of soft power. The author made arguments about the imminent transformation and importance of the sources of power that countries possess. It was argued that the nature of power continues to change – in an age of information-based economies and transnational interdependence, power is becoming less transferable, less tangible, and less coercive.¹¹ J. S. Nye identified, that, although the military force, economic scale, political cohesion will remain important factors in the disposal of various political actors, a greater role for informational and institutional actors will be seen.¹² Countries are more hesitant to exercise their power by traditional directive or commanding methods, because of costs and risks that is an outcome of it, and prefer the indirect ways of influence, such as soft power. J. S. Nye defined the soft power concept as power, which rests on the attraction of one’s ideas or on the ability to set the political agenda in a way that shapes the preferences that others express – this dimension tends to be associated with intangible

¹¹ Joseph S. Nye “The Changing Nature of World Power”. 1990. p. 8.

¹² Ibid, p. 8.

power resources such as culture, ideology and institutions.¹³ Basically, soft power co-opts people rather than coerces them.

The theory became one of the staples in explaining contemporary diplomacy and foreign relations and it was expanded further. The academic has made clarifications about a vague concept of the soft power and explained certain distinctions about the term. Soft power does not mean influence or ability to move people by argument, but it is the ability to attract by the assets and attraction, which often leads to acquiescence.¹⁴ However, the soft power should not be equated with popular cultural power or basic resources that sometimes help to produce it, since for example, the popularity of Pokémon games does not assure that Japan will get the policy outcomes it wishes.¹⁵ Also, it is very important to estimate soft power in relevant terms, because there are some situations in which soft power provides very little leverage, nonetheless, when a government is concerned about structural milieu goals or general value objectives, it is often the case that soft power turn out to be superior to hard power.¹⁶

J. S. Nye defined that the soft power of a country rests primarily on three resources – its culture (in places where it is attractive to others), its political values (when it lives up to them at home and abroad) and its foreign policy (when they are seen as legitimate and having moral authority).¹⁷ The resource of culture is explained by the spread of specific cultural practices outside its borders for the public of receiving country, the attraction makes it easier to promote certain policies. J. S. Nye defines culture in a vast sense – from popular culture and its products to education. Political values and foreign policy resource explanations are intertwined, domestically as behaviour on its own soil and in foreign terms as collaboration and active participation in international institutions or even as a promotion of certain values such as, for example, peace and human rights.¹⁸

In his earlier explanations J. S. Nye did attribute the economy related resources to the hard power spectrum of behaviours and explained it through the definition of inducement; subsequently, because of the modern political trends, a revision of the economic characteristic as a power tool was necessary. Therefore, the arguments for an economic resource as a soft power resource were made. According to the academic, the economic resources can be used to attract as well as coerce, although it is sometimes difficult to distinguish what part of an economic

¹³ Ibid. p. 6.

¹⁴ Joseph S. Nye “Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics”. 2004, p. 6.

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 12.

¹⁶ Joseph S. Nye “The Future of Power”. 2011, p. 84.

¹⁷ Joseph S. Nye “Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics”. 2004, p. 6.

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 14.

relationship is composed of hard power and what is made of soft power.¹⁹ For example, the desire of countries to accede to the European Union, described by European leaders as a sign of EU soft power, which is displayed by orienting their expectations and revising its local laws, policies, could be understood through lens of soft power (as an attraction to successful economic and political system) and hard power (economic inducement of market access).²⁰

The soft power theory as a concept has its limitations, regarding its comprehensive application in research. J. S. Nye does not specify any instruments as a measurement tool for the soft power, which makes this theory an incomplete academic concept from the viewpoint of some theorists. Critics proclaim that J. S. Nye did not make any attempt to clearly define the relationship of the soft power concept to other theoretical concepts in political science, such as interests, social norms and rules.²¹ Moreover, J. S. Nye does not provide a clear methodology on how to operationalise soft power in empirical research. Although the lack of methodological concept is identified, the theory is widely applied as an analytical tool to explain power projection of countries.

1.2. Chinese soft power

In this section the Chinese soft power peculiarities will be described. As mentioned in the introduction, at the start of the 21st century, China re-evaluated its internal and foreign policy and adopted a new strategy, which involved the employment of a soft power approach in order to change the image of the country. In 2013, after Xi Jinping took over the presidential office, it was evident that Chinese soft power was on a course of improvement. The significance of soft power has noticeably heightened under the rule of Xi Jinping. Through the time Beijing has adopted a tailored soft power approach, often labelled as “soft power with Chinese characteristics”, which broadens and distorts the traditional soft power definition as well as its toolkit and power resources. China applies a different approach to the concept, which cannot be defined by traditionally understood terms since, according to some Chinese intellectuals, the concept of soft power was invented in the United States by Joseph S. Nye, an American, who was using the concept to reassure Americans that their importance and relative power were not declining after the Cold War.²² Also, it is argued that China’s specialness surpasses the unique characteristics of other countries and to emphasize China’s specialness is to realize China’s self-confidence, self-

¹⁹ Joseph S. Nye “The Future of Power”. 2011, p. 85.

²⁰ Ibid, p. 85.

²¹ Vytautas Isoda “Kas yra švelnioji galia? Sąvokos ribos ir empirinių tyrimų metodologijos apmatai”. 2013, p. 2.

²² Daniel C. Lynch „The End of China’s Rise“. 2019, p. 4.

awareness, and particular burdens.²³ It is very important to underline, that soft power projected by China and even a Chinese perception of soft power are vague concepts, which have loose interpretations. Anything that might improve China's image is considered an element of soft power, even Chinese hard power – Beijing sometimes even draws attention to its hard power to support its soft power.²⁴ The topic of Chinese soft power is extensively discussed in the academic literature and is worthy of a separate research, thus, in this section I will attempt to briefly define the main and most identifiable features of Chinese soft power.

One of the main and most important features of Chinese soft power is the economic toolkit of the country. David Shambaugh argues that economic resource is the strongest instrument in the Chinese foreign policy – money, epitomised by investment deals, generous loans and aid packages around the globe.²⁵ The Belt and Road Initiative, introduced in 2013 as One Belt, One Road, is considered as the main economic resource of Chinese soft power. Although there are various implications of the adoption of this enhanced economic diplomacy model, most usually the initiative is marketed as an instrument to build connectivity and cooperation between China and the rest of the world. The globally promoted notion of Belt and Road Initiative is best summarized by President Xi Jinping: “China will actively promote international cooperation through the Belt and Road Initiative - in doing so, we hope to achieve policy, infrastructure, trade, financial, and people-to-people connectivity and thus build a new platform for international cooperation to create new drivers of shared development.”²⁶ China took advantage of the international power vacuum, since at the time the United States exhibited signs of protectionist turn as well as withdrawal from its international obligations, and appealed to other countries by embracing the liberal economic global order – in the speeches of Chinese officials new global infrastructure development strategy was marketed as a rhetoric of “inclusive globalisation”, which was marketed by promotion of slogans such as catch-up development, poverty alleviation, win-win cooperation and multilateralism.²⁷ Enrico V. Gloria offers a brief grouping, by which the researcher distinguishes main values that are discursively utilised by China in its economic soft power approach (through the tool of Belt and Road Initiative). Three component values are categorised: “win-win or mutual benefit” (emphasised as positive-sum benefits in alternative to zero-sum politics, which are expressed as an expanded external cooperation through common development, shared benefits and mutually beneficial

²³ Ibid, p. 5.

²⁴ Maria Repnikova “The Balance of the Soft Power: The American and Chinese Quests to Win Hearts and Minds”. 2022.

²⁵ David Shambaugh “China’s Soft-Power Push”. 2015. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2015-06-16/chinas-soft-power-push>

²⁶ OECD Business and Finance Outlook “China’s Belt and Road Initiative in the Global Trade, Investment and Finance Landscape”. 2018, p. 4.

²⁷ Mustafa Yagci “Rethinking Soft Power in Light of China’s Belt and Road Initiative“. 2018, p. 9.

cooperation for involved political actors); “peace and cooperation” (emphasised as a historically peaceful nature of China’s external relations, different from other major power rivals); “openness, inclusiveness and mutual learning” (emphasised as appreciation of diversity and relative equality among nations, resulting in spread of valuable know-how by maintaining equal exchanges between borders).²⁸

It was mentioned that an economic resource in Chinese soft power is also epitomised by aid packages. The aid packages are usually provided through the instruments issuing of grants, interest free loans or concessional loans for delivering aid or promoting development cooperation.²⁹ China’s foreign aid capability is largely integrated into its global infrastructure development strategy (Belt and Road Initiative), through funding of infrastructure or economic development projects, by aforementioned means, although other aid forms are noticeable as well. China is active in providing educational aid and training, poverty reduction (most abundant in Africa), emergency humanitarian aid, medical and health assistance.³⁰ The latter two were most distinguishable globally in a form of Chinese “mask diplomacy”, which was used as a tool to boost Beijing’s image as a responsible global leader at the peak of COVID-19 global pandemic – it was marked by large as well as rapid (especially in comparison of other countries) distribution and supply of contextually important resources and securing relatively stable supply lines.³¹ Through these means China sends a message that it is a responsible and action-driven major power as well as a reliable partner.

It must be underlined, that particular utilisation of economic resources in China’s power projection could also apply to the definition of hard power – a capacity of coercion in order to make a political actor act in a way in which that entity would have acted. China has been accused of deploying such methods as trade restrictions (limiting foreign access to the Chinese market by import and export restrictions), popular boycotts (usually applied for companies), tourism restrictions (blocking outbound tourism or stopping sending students), and targeting enterprises operating on its soil, investment restrictions (imposing limits on its outward FDI).³² Beijing also used its economic tool to mitigate some foreign policy issues – for example, the dispute on the South China Sea with Manila was put “on hold” after the President of the Philippines secured Chinese funding and investments.

²⁸ Enrico V. Gloria “The Silk Road Spirit: China’s BRI discourse and its pursuit for great power status”. 2021, p. 8.

²⁹ Jingdong Yuan, Fei Su, Xuwan Ouyang “China’s Evolving Approach to Foreign Aid”. 2022, p. 3.

³⁰ Ibid, p. 17.

³¹ Brian Wong “China’s Mask Diplomacy”. The Diplomat. 2020. <https://thediplomat.com/2020/03/chinas-mask-diplomacy/>

³² Marcin Szczepanski (European Parliamentary Research Service) “China’s economic coercion: evolution, characteristics and countermeasures”. 2022, p. 5.

The power resource of culture is also well exploited in the projection of Chinese soft power. The country has evidently operationalised its language, education, and media to convey messages about China. One of the most important instruments in the cultural toolkit of Chinese soft power is the network of Confucius Institute – a public educational and cultural promotion organisation. It is an important instrument in order to adapt the global need of Chinese language learning, enhancing understanding of the culture, encouraging cultural exchange and developing friendly relations with foreign nations.³³ China also employs such instruments as people-to-people diplomacy, which occurs through such platforms as educational exchanges, arranging seminars for professionals, hosting or organising global events and so on to promote China’s culture and values with the aim of enhancing the cultural attraction and image of the country.

Albeit, it is noticeable that China is seeking to employ its cultural resources to air its views and transmit messages about itself. The necessity of communication of China’s story by China itself was emphasized by Xi Jinping as one of the objectives – “the country needs to build its capacity in international communication, construct a communication system, better use the new media and increase the creativity, appeal and credibility of China’s publicity; the stories of China should be well told (i.e., by Chinese media in contrast to stories offered by Western media), voices of China well spread (i.e., through China’s own message channels), and characteristics of China well explained (i.e., in line with the image that the Chinese government wishes to share with the world).³⁴ It could be explained by the notion, that from Chinese perspective, the global dominance of Western transnational media resulted in “a systematically, and, maliciously, distorted account of Chinese realities” – therefore, China aspired to obtain more influence over how issues are framed.³⁵ China has made major investments into its key media outlets in order to expand into more locations, produce more content as well as to enhance its audience by striking deals with the largest newspapers to carry its content. Researchers argue that China is using its soft power projection to shape information environment globally not only by spreading information that casts China in a favourable light, but also by countering narratives disseminated by China’s critics.³⁶ This kind of projection is noticeable not only through projection of messages that promote China as a lucrative partner or celebrate its culture, but also as promotion of Chinese position on such sensitive topics as COVID-19, Taiwan or Uyghurs or even negative description of other political actors.

³³ Maria Repnikova “Chinese Soft Power”. 2022, p. 12.

³⁴ Zhan Zhang “The Dilemma of China’s Soft Power in Europe” 2019, p. 3.

³⁵ Ibid, p. 9.

³⁶ David L. Sloss “China’s Growing Discourse Power and Resurgent Authoritarianism”. 2022, p. 5.

1.3. *Framing theory*

Considering that the main goal of the research is to identify Chinese soft power frames in the rhetoric of Lithuanian politicians and public figures and to investigate how that rhetoric is expressed, it was decided to also base the research on the frame theory in order to investigate the problem of the research.

The initial development of the frame theory is generally attributed to Erving Goffman, who introduced the concept of frame analysis into the field of sociology. Frame analysis was introduced as a tool to understand how an observer manages to perceive meanings in interactions that participants themselves do not, which is based on laying attention not on the interaction itself, but on the implicit rules, that shape the meanings generated within the interaction.³⁷ Frames attempt to convey that what goes on in interaction is governed by usually unstated rules or principles more or less implicitly set by the character of some larger, though perhaps invisible, entity within which the interaction occurs.³⁸ Although Erving Goffman presented an idea of analysing the meanings behind data, the author did not provide a conceptualized terminology of the theory.

The theory of framing was later developed by Robert M. Entman, who identified the failure among the disciplines to conceptualize the idea of framing and to offer a comprehensive explanation of a frame theory. The scholar describes the concept of framing as consistently offering a way to describe the power of a communicating text, analysis of frames illuminates the precise way in which influence over a human consciousness is exerted by the transfer (or communication) of information from one location (such as speech, utterance, news report, or novel) to that consciousness.³⁹ According to R. M. Entman, framing essentially involves selection and salience⁴⁰. To frame something means to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described.⁴¹ The construction of frames may help to deconstruct the analysed text by variety of ways. Framing concept is vital in order to conduct a content analysis. According to Robert M. Entman, the major task of determining textual meaning should be to identify and describe frames, since content analysis informed by a theory of framing would avoid treating all negative or positive terms or utterances as equally salient and influential - unguided by a framing paradigm, content analysis may

³⁷ Erving Goffman "Frame Analysis: an Essay on the Organization of Experience". 1986, p. 13.

³⁸ Ibid, p. 13.

³⁹ Robert M. Entman "Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm". 1993, p. 2.

⁴⁰ Robert M. Entman defines 'salience' as making a piece of information more noticeable, meaningful, or memorable to audiences.

⁴¹ Ibid, p. 2.

often yield data that misrepresent the messages that most audience members are actually picking up.⁴²

It is important to highlight that the theory of framing does not have a unified explanation of its application. The research of framing has been characterized by theoretical and empirical vagueness, there is a lack of consistency in how the authors define and apply the concepts of frame and framing.⁴³ Frame analysis should not be regarded as a unified methodology, but rather a diverse range of methods to analyse discourse, including content analysis, narrative analysis, and discourse analysis.⁴⁴ Regarding the field of politics, frame refers to considerations regarding certain features and implications of the policy issue – when developing policy argument politicians may deliberately attempt to formulate a policy frame by highlighting certain features of reality and by employing metaphors, stories, and discourses.⁴⁵ Frames are detectable through policy actors' discourse⁴⁶ on a policy situation and issue. Therefore, policy frames can be captured by analysing core arguments in policy texts collected from written or oral forms of policy discourse.⁴⁷

2. Literature review

As briefly mentioned in the introduction, the topic of the Chinese soft power in Lithuania is not thoroughly researched. Although, in some researches or publications the topic has been partly discussed or at least described.

The topic of Chinese soft power in Lithuania is notable in the publications of Konstantinas Andrijauskas. According to the researcher, the projection of Chinese soft power in Lithuania was noticed through Beijing's globally used instrument usually described as "mask diplomacy". China effectively reacted to an urgent need of various medical needs in order to battle the exponential increase of confirmed COVID-19 cases. On 20th of March, 2020, Lithuanian Ministry of Health revealed that it struck the deal for the purchase of respirators, masks and other personal protective equipment from China – on the same morning the first Chinese humanitarian cargo reached the country with a large contribution of a rather controversial Chinese technology

⁴² Ibid, p. 7.

⁴³ Aurora Iorgoveanu, Nicoleta Corbu "No consensus of framing? Towards an integrative approach to define frames both as text and visuals". 2012, p. 2.

⁴⁴ Junseop Shim, Chisung Park, Mark Wilding "Identifying policy frames through semantic network analysis: an examination of nuclear energy policy across six countries". 2015, p. 2.

⁴⁵ Ibid, p. 6.

⁴⁶ By the definition of discourse of T. A. van Dijk, policy discourses can be considered to be comprised of policy addresses, speeches and dialog about policy issues.

⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 6.

company “Huawei”.⁴⁸ As claimed by the scholar, the aid package was sealed with stickers, celebrating the friendship of Lithuania and China. It is worth mentioning that in its reports of the aforementioned story the Chinese Embassy in Lithuania also showed appreciation for China Chamber of Commerce in Lithuania – the organisation, which is notorious for its involvement in a diplomatic incident, regarding the scandalous circumstances of Hong Kong solidarity rally in Vilnius.⁴⁹

As claimed by K. Andrijauskas, it is evident that China also actively projected its soft power through the area of sports, in that way introducing itself through means, well accessible to the general public and presenting itself as a political actor, invested into Lithuanian culture. In 2020 a controversially received technology company “Huawei” has re-signed a partnership with Lithuanian Basketball Federation – in a new contract the partnership was much more highlighted, since the national women’s basketball league was renamed after the aforementioned company.⁵⁰ A similar case was seen in a football sector, when US-sanctioned video surveillance company “Hikvision” struck a deal with a former Lithuanian football champion “Sūduva”.⁵¹

The examples of the projection of China’s story through its discursive power are also mentioned in K. Andrijauskas’ publications. Chinese Embassy in Lithuania has been supplying its opinion pieces on China-related topics, including controversial ones, to Lithuanian media outlets since, at least, 2016, although the embassy made efforts to conceal the traces of opinion-making.⁵² Interesting public efforts also targeting the politicians were made – for instance, the screening of a movie depicting the Chinese take on the Tibetan issue was attended by several Lithuanian officials.⁵³ Also, the use of China’s discourse power was seen in the projection of messages about the global pandemic. In mid-February of 2020 comments of the ambassador of China to Lithuania, Shen Zhifei, were published in one of the largest local news portals, calling for mutual solidarity in the face of the health crisis, which was illustrated by an example of a Harbin-based Lithuanian student’s personal experience – however after 10 weeks in one of the news portals Shen Zhifei denied the claims that the virus originated from China.⁵⁴

The aspects of power projection, described by K. Andrijauskas, were also briefly reported in the National Threat Assessment 2021. The State Security Department indeed reports that “mask diplomacy” was evident through shipments of medical equipment - these were designated as

⁴⁸ Konstantinas Andrijauskas “Kinijos ir Lietuvos Santykiai 2020 m. Nusimetant kaukes?”. 2021, p. 8.

⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 8.

⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 11.

⁵¹ Ibid, p. 11.

⁵² Konstantinas Andrijauskas “The Dragon and the Knight: China’s Growing Presence in Lithuania“. 2020, p. 13.

⁵³ Ibid, p. 13.

⁵⁴ Konstantinas Andrijauskas “Kinijos ir Lietuvos Santykiai 2020 m. Nusimetant kaukes?”. 2021, p. 9.

gifts of Chinese companies, which have interest in Lithuanian energy and telecommunications sectors. Projection of China's discourse is also evident. China managed the information discourse by expanding cooperation with Lithuanian media outlets. It resulted by publication of articles in which China's achievements in the fight against the pandemic were praised, articles also emphasized the importance of Belt and Road Initiative and also scolded Lithuanian politicians and activists for expressing criticism, regarding human rights violations or policies in Hong Kong or Taiwan.⁵⁵

The Chinese soft power concept and its toolkit in Lithuania were also partly discussed by the investigative journalism group Re:Baltica, which released a series of articles on Chinese soft power in the Baltic States. It was found that in the case of Lithuania, China captured the attention of the local decision makers by projecting its soft power through its economic attraction – the most populous country in the world in the last decade has presented itself as an alternative in order to accomplish some state-level goals. The Chinese were declaring promises to make Lithuania one of its regional logistics hubs by expanding the seaport, which would attract vast foreign direct investments and enhance local capabilities, as well as intending to invest into some local business sectors.⁵⁶ Furthermore, Re:Baltica has identified that China is projecting its soft power through cultural means as well, more specifically, through the Confucius Institute. Although it is officially declared that soft power is projected through positive means, such as teaching the language or culture, journalists claim that China uses its discourse power, which is expressed through teachings of Chinese culture and history that avoid the issue of human rights and educates that Tibet and Taiwan are inseparable parts of China.⁵⁷

Regarding extensive research in the academic literature, no dedicated papers on attempting to identify the Chinese soft power frames by analysing the discourse of public figures or politicians in Lithuania were found. However, it is worth mentioning that a research was published in 2015, in which Chinese soft power through the tool of Confucius Institute was examined. The analysis revealed that Confucius Institute of Vilnius University managed to increase China's soft power by attracting the audience, but it was not able to convince people to behave as it was expected, therefore it was concluded that the institute had a minor impact, as a Chinese soft power tool in Lithuania.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ "Bendras VSD ir AOTD grėsmių nacionaliniam saugumui vertinimas 2021". State Security Department of Lithuania. 2021, p. 15.

⁵⁶ Naglis Navakas, Holger Roonemaa, Mari Eesmaa, Inese Liepina "The golden handcuffs of Chinese Investment". 2019. <https://en.rebaltica.lv/2019/09/the-golden-handcuffs-of-chinese-investment/>.

⁵⁷ Naglis Navakas, Holger Roonemaa, Mari Eesmaa, Inese Liepina, Sabine Berzina "The Rough Face of China's Soft Power". 2019. <https://en.rebaltica.lv/2019/09/the-rough-face-of-chinas-soft-power/>.

⁵⁸ Agnė Vonžodaitė "Kinijos švelnioji galia: Vilniaus Universiteto Konfucijaus Instituto atvejis". 2016, p. 72.

In respect of the existing researches, it is noteworthy that recently a similar attempt of analysing what is spoken about China by Lithuanian politicians was carried out. The research aimed to assess the strength of the intention of speech acts securitizing China in the Lithuanian public discourse, formed after the establishment of the Taiwanese representation. The results of the analysis showed, that the intention of the speech acts forming the Lithuanian public discourse to securitize China after the establishment of the Taiwanese representation strengthened but the public did not support the intention of the speech acts securitizing China.⁵⁹

In summary, review of the relevant literature revealed that certain aspects of Chinese soft power in Lithuania were described or investigated, although a lack of attempts to thoroughly research the rhetoric of Lithuanian politicians and public figures is identified. Therefore the chosen study will add new insights to the Chinese soft power phenomenon in Lithuania.

3. Methodology

Taking into account the goal of the study – to identify the Chinese soft power frames in the assessments and opinions of Lithuanian politicians and public figures and to analyse how they are expressed, a qualitative inductive content analysis was chosen as the most applicable to conduct the research. The method is commonly used with text-based data, either written transcripts of verbal interactions or documents created in written form, and it aims to produce an understanding of the meaning of different individual texts in the data set.⁶⁰

The review of the relevant literature revealed that the topic of Chinese soft power in Lithuania is not thoroughly researched and there is a lack of research on Chinese soft power, involving framing analysis. Accordingly, no defined or operationalised frames, which could be utilised in the analysis, were found. Therefore, an inductive method of analysing frames was adopted. During the inductive analysis the researcher looks for similarities and differences in the data, which are described – found patterns are characterised in categories and/or themes on various levels of abstraction and interpretation.⁶¹ This type of design is usually appropriate when existing theory or research literature on a phenomenon is limited.⁶² Because of such limiting preconditions, the analytical method is proposed. Researchers should immerse themselves in the data to allow new insights to emerge – data analysis starts with reading all data repeatedly to obtain sense of whole;

⁵⁹ Karolis Petrauskas “Kinijos Liaudies Respublikos sugrėsminimas Lietuvos viešajame diskurse dėl taivaniečių atstovybės įkūrimo”. 2022, p. 5.

⁶⁰ Danya F. Vears, L. Gilliam “Inductive content analysis: a guide for beginning qualitative researchers”. 2022, p. 2.

⁶¹ Ulla H. Graneheim, Britt-Marie Lindgren, Berit Lundman “Methodological challenges in qualitative content analysis: a discussion paper”. 2017.

⁶² Hsiu-Fang Hsieh, Sarah E. Shannon “Three Approaches to Qualitative Content Analysis”. 2005, p. 3.

then, data is read word by word to derive codes by highlighting the words that appear to capture key thoughts or concepts; next, the researcher approaches the text by making notes of first impressions, thoughts and initial analysis and as this continues, labels for codes emerge that are reflective of more than one key thought and become the initial coding scheme; codes then are sorted into categories based on how different codes are related and linked; categories are used to organise and group codes into meaningful clusters.⁶³

In the research, the politicians⁶⁴ and public figures⁶⁵, who expressed favourable views towards China in their rhetoric⁶⁶ were analysed. The rhetoric of various Lithuanian politicians and public figures was selected by utilising keywords such as “Kinija”, “Kinijos”, “Kinų”, “Uigūrai”, “Sindziangas”, “Taivas”, “Taipejus” in the transcripts of plenary sittings of the Lithuanian Parliament, in order to sort out China-related speeches. Also, the aforementioned keywords were used in the “Google” search engine and search bars of major and most popular Lithuanian news websites (“delfi.lt”, “lrt.lt”, “15min.lt”, “lrytas.lt”, tv3.lt), in order to sort out China-related comments in the interviews or to identify articles, opinion pieces, social media posts, television or radio shows in which China-related questions are discussed. In total 626 sources of data were inspected in order to find the rhetoric in which favourable views towards China were expressed. In the context of the research favourable views are recognised as a positive wording in describing China, wording that counters negative narratives about China and also a neutral wording that reiterates China’s position. Every result of the search was checked manually, in order to indicate the rhetoric, in which Chinese soft power aspects were expressed.

After conducting the search the politicians and public figures, who have expressed Chinese soft power aspects in their rhetoric, were identified. In the context of the research the Chinese soft power aspects are understood as the features described in theoretical background such as the attraction to economic might of China and the opportunities offered by it; the appreciation of China’s aid capability; appeal of Chinese culture and values; declaration of Chinese position on sensitive topics. The identified politicians are (in the alphabetic order): Algirdas Butkevičius, Petras Gražulis, Ramūnas Karbauskis, Dainius Kėpėnis, Andrius Mazuronis, Gintautas Paluckas, Jonas Pinskus, Viktoras Pranckietis, Mindaugas Puidokas, Artūras Skardžius, Saulius Skvernelis, Giedrius Surplys, Valdemaras Valkiūnas (former or current members of the Lithuanian Parliament),

⁶³ Ibid, p. 3.

⁶⁴ In the context of this research, politicians are understood as the President of Lithuania as well as members of the Lithuanian Parliament or members of the European Parliament at the timeline of the research.

⁶⁵ In the context of this research, public figures are understood as representatives of various organisations or companies, who have expressed their China-related views.

⁶⁶ In the context of this research, rhetoric is understood as a declaration of position in interviews, opinion pieces, radio and television shows, plenary sittings, social media.

Gitanas Nausėda⁶⁷ (incumbent President of Lithuania), Vytenis Povilas Andriukaitis, Vilija Blinkevičiūtė, Stasys Jakeliūnas (former or current members of the European Parliament). The identified public figures are: Sigitas Besagirskas (President of Vilnius Industry and Business Association), Kęstutis Černeckas (Chairman of the Board of the Export Club at Vilnius Chamber of Commerce), Marijus Velička (former Vice-Minister of National Defence), Kristijonas Vizbaras (co-founder of Brolis group).

In order to ensure that all the relevant data regarding identified politicians and public figures was found, the previously described keywords were combined with names of identified individuals and entered into the aforementioned search engine or into search bars of aforementioned news webpages. Only data sources published from the release of The National Threat Assessment 2019 (issued on the 5th of February, 2019) until 2022 November inclusive were covered. Such interval was determined, because then China for the first time was identified as a potential threat by the state security agencies. In total 100 sources of data were identified as suitable for the analysis. In the research, the rhetoric of identified politicians and public figures was analysed in order to find Chinese soft power frames and to reveal how that rhetoric is expressed. The findings of the analysis will be divided into different parts representing the researched individuals⁶⁸ which will be displayed in the alphabetical order. Subsequently, the identified frames, that are going to be determined from the core arguments in the analysed rhetoric, will be presented and described. Accordingly, the conclusions of the research will be made.

4. Analysis of the identified politicians

In this section, the rhetoric of selected politicians will be analysed. The politicians are understood as individuals who were members of the Lithuanian Parliament or members of the European Parliament in the timeline of the research. Also, the rhetoric of incumbent President of Lithuania and his advisors will also be analysed.

4.1. Vytenis Povilas Andriukaitis

In the rhetoric of Vytenis Povilas Andriukaitis the comments that indicate the search for responsibility regarding the demise of Sino-Lithuanian relations are noticeable. The former Member of the European Parliament directly criticizes the current Government and the politicians of the ruling coalition of the Parliament. V. P. Andriukaitis claims that the aforementioned political

⁶⁷ Comments of the Presidential advisors, on behalf of the President, will be also analysed.

⁶⁸ Dainius Kepenis, Jonas Pinskus, Mindaugas Puidokas were grouped into one part because of the lack of data.

actors are responsible for, in his view, *creating and escalating* the current tensions between Beijing and Vilnius. The politician labels the authorization of opening of the Taiwanese Representative Office in Vilnius under such a title as a “mistake” and accuses current political leaders of instigation by describing the event as a violation of Chinese interests.⁶⁹ The politician harshly criticizes one of the Governments’ declared foreign policy features, such as a “values-based foreign policy”. V. P. Andriukaitis in his rhetoric explains that the “escalation of international conflicts and tensions”, by executing the aforementioned foreign policy, is an infringement of the European Union foreign policy culture, concluded as multinational relations based on international law.⁷⁰ It is worth mentioning that the politician did not make any comments that indicate even partial blame of China regarding the decline of bilateral relations between China and Lithuania.

Also V. P. Andriukaitis has displayed an appreciation for Chinese measures in combating the COVID-19 epidemic. In the first quarter of 2020 the politician claimed that Lithuania could replicate the best practices of Chinese strategy regarding the containment of virus. Specifically, V. P. Andriukaitis has praised China’s strict biosecurity measures, coordinated work by sanitary epidemiological services, quarantines and an effective public information communication strategy as producing positive results.⁷¹ Albeit it must be mentioned, that such comments appeared in the earliest stages of COVID-19 pandemic in Lithuania when there was an information vacuum in the medical community about the virus itself and its containment measures.

4.2. Vilija Blinkevičiūtė

In the rhetoric of Vilija Blinkevičiūtė the discussion of China-related issues is abundant through the search for responsibility for the demise of bilateral relations between China and Lithuania. The leader of the Social Democratic Party of Lithuania in her comments is critical of the current Government since she believes that it is at fault for the demise of the Sino-Lithuanian relations. In the opinion of V. Blinkevičiūtė, the current foreign policy direction and its means is a “decision to fight with China” and “a foreign policy mistake”. The Member of the European Parliament even indicates that the politicians of the Homeland Union are at fault since they “are creating new battlefronts” and are leading a foreign policy that does not even correspond to requirements described in the Lithuanian Constitution since the aforementioned party leaders are

⁶⁹ Delfi.lt. “Iš esmės. Andriukaičio ir Kubiliaus ginčas: kovot ar taikytis su Kinija?”. (2022/01/11). <https://www.delfi.lt/video/laidos/is-esmes/is-esmes-andriukaicio-ir-kubiliaus-gincas-kovot-ar-taikytis-su-kinija.d?id=89169173>

⁷⁰ Lrt.lt. “Vytenis Andriukaitis. Paslaugūs kvailiai? Apie “vertybininkus“ Lopatą, Kasčiūną ir Maldeikį“. (2022/01/08). <https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/pozicija/679/1582994/vytenis-andriukaitis-paslaugus-kvailiai-apie-vertybininkus-lopata-kasciuna-ir-maldeiki>

⁷¹ LSDP. Vytenis Andriukaitis “Į pagalbą A. Verygai: kaip stabdyti viruso plitimą (10 patarimų)“. (2020/03/19). <https://www.lsdp.lt/vytenis-andriukaitis-i-pagalba-a-verygai-kaip-stabdyti-viruso-plitima/>

not achieving the goals of “stability, peace and safety”.⁷² Also, the politician scolds the Government for its initiatives and claims that these were not coordinated with other political powers even though it involved the long-term foreign policy changes. V. Blinkevičiūtė directly names that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania did not evaluate the possible risks and did not even consult with the President or oppositional political factions in the Parliament.⁷³ It is worth mentioning that in the rhetoric of the politician there are no comments regarding China’s blame or involvement in the failure of Sino-Lithuanian relations.

4.3. Algirdas Butkevičius

In the rhetoric of Algirdas Butkevičius comments of economic nature are abundant since the politician praises the benefits of cooperation with China. The former Prime Minister of Lithuania in his rhetoric frequently introduces the examples of his tenure in the period from 2012 to 2016 when bilateral relations with China could be described as rapidly growing. The politician portrays China as a partner which is beneficial for Lithuania and praises the efforts of high Chinese officials who, in his words, put efforts to enhance the cooperation between the countries and “*built bridges*” for Lithuanian businesses.⁷⁴ Also, A. Butkevičius praises China as a partner which indeed provided fruitful economic benefits for Lithuania. According to the politician, Lithuania’s economic cooperation with China results in a quick reaction from the latter country in order to fill the vacuum of investments. The politician appreciates the Chinese economic cooperation forums and other formats of multinational cooperation and gives an example of rail transit figures, of the period from 2018 to 2020, which have multiplied by almost couple hundred times in 2 years after the politician participated in the Boao Forum for Asia.⁷⁵ In addition, A. Butkevičius appreciated the prospects offered by the Cooperation between China and Central and Eastern European Countries initiative (today more widely known as 14+1 forum) by explaining that it enhanced the political cooperation with other countries.⁷⁶ Also, the former Prime Minister is dissatisfied that China is not appreciated

⁷² Lrt.lt. “Blinkevičiūtė ragina gesinti Lietuvos konfliktą su Kinija, o Landsbergį – atsistatydinti“. (2022/01/10). <https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/lietuvoje/2/1584473/blinkeviciute-ragina-gesinti-lietuvos-konflikta-su-kinija-o-landsbergi-atsistatydinti>

⁷³ LSDP. “V. Blinkevičiūtė – po socialdemokratų susitikimo su G. Landsbergiu: išgirdau tik tuščius pažadus“. (2022/02/17). <https://www.lsdp.lt/v-blinkeviciute-po-socialdemokratu-susitikimo-su-g-landsbergiu-isingirdau-tik-tuscious-pazadus/>

⁷⁴ LR Seimas press release. “Seimo Tarpparlamentinių ryšių su Kinija Liaudies Respublika grupės vadovybė susitiko su Kinijos Liaudies Respublikos laikinoju reikalų patikėtiniu“. (2021/12/02). https://www.lrs.lt/sip/portal.show?p_r=38800&p_k=1&p_t=279162

⁷⁵ Klaipėda.lt. “Traukinys nesujungė Klaipėdos su Kinijos miestais: kodėl užgeso „Saulė“?“. (2022/01/27). <https://klaipeda.diena.lt/naujienos/klaipeda/miesto-pulsas/traukinys-turejes-sujungti-klaipeda-su-kinijos-miestais-kodel-uzgeso-saule-1061245>

⁷⁶ Lrt.lt. “Butkevičius – apie tai, kodėl sunku Šimonytei ir ko neįvertino pats būdamas premjeru“. (2022/01/29). <https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/lietuvoje/2/1596411/butkevicius-apie-tai-kodel-sunku-simonytei-ir-ko-neivertino-pats-budamas-premjeru>

as an economic partner. In the opinion of A. Butkevičius, Lithuania is a transit country therefore China's economic model and its economic demands apply well to the Baltic state.⁷⁷

It is worth mentioning that A. Butkevičius in his rhetoric defines Lithuania as an unprecedented case. The former Prime Minister of Lithuania doubts, in his words, the decision to cut the political partnership with China. The politician questions the direction of Lithuania's foreign policy and compares Lithuania with other countries of the European Union which, in his view, did not change their foreign policies which resulted in cutting their relationship with China.⁷⁸ A. Butkevičius also asserts that even Lithuania's closest allies, such as the United States, are not jeopardizing their relationship with China.

4.4. Petras Gražulis

In the rhetoric of Petras Gražulis the search for responsibility regarding the worsened bilateral relations of Lithuania and China is evident. The politician is very critical of the Government, directly naming it as a responsible actor in the diplomatic confrontation between the aforementioned countries. P. Gražulis accuses the current political leaders for, in his opinion, unsuccessful foreign policy which he describes as a "declaration of war against China".⁷⁹ The theme of war is reoccurring in China-related comments of P. Gražulis in order to describe the executed policies. For instance, P. Gražulis indicates that the most accountable in this situation is the Minister of Foreign Affairs Gabrielius Landsbergis who, according to P. Gražulis, "declared the war" for various countries, including China, and only ruined Lithuania's relations with all the countries.⁸⁰ Also, the politician is critical of one of the ruling party, the Homeland Union's, foreign policy goal of "defending democracy worldwide". P. Gražulis describes it as confrontational and ironically suggests that it could be manifested as "troop deployment in China" and other countries in the future.⁸¹ In addition, according to the politician, the foreign policy towards China, led by the Government, also negatively affects Lithuanian relations with its allies. It is worth mentioning that in the rhetoric of P. Gražulis no comments regarding China's blame or involvement in the failure of Sino-Lithuanian relations were found.

⁷⁷ LR Seimas, Democratic faction "Vardan Lietuvos" press release "Saulius Skvernelis apie Lietuvos santykius su Kinija: kyla daug klausimų, prie ko tai prives". (2021/09/16).

https://www.lrs.lt/sip/portal.show?p_r=35715&p_k=1&p_t=277977

⁷⁸ Delfi.lt. "Iš esmės. Kuo baigsis Lietuvos, Kinijos ir Taivano "Meilės trikampis"?" (2022/01/05).

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NO7Cz_1bhkg

⁷⁹ LR Seimas. III (Rudens) sesijos rytinio posėdžio Nr.108 stenograma. (2021/11/09). <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAK/af861770418111ecac25bd9c0b3391dc>

⁸⁰ LR Seimas. III (Rudens) sesijos rytinio posėdžio Nr.122 stenograma. (2021/12/09). <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAK/9ff6b4d0591a11ecacf0d54306d0ca27>

⁸¹ LR Seimas. I (Rudens) sesijos rytinio posėdžio Nr.10 stenograma. (2020/12/08). <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAK/f608bfd03a0811eb8c97e01ffe050e1c>

Furthermore, it is important to mention that P. Gražulis does question the credibility of national security conclusions issued by the State Security Department of Lithuania and does not see China as a threat. After the release of The National Threat Assessment in 2020 the politician made a comment about growing state security risks posed by China. In one of the plenary sittings P. Gražulis humorously expressed astonishment about the aforementioned conclusions and rhetorically claimed that “next year some kind of aliens will certainly be an even bigger threat to Lithuania than China”.⁸²

4.5. Stasys Jakeliūnas

In the rhetoric of Stasys Jakeliūnas the economic topic is discussed and the politician interprets China as a vital partner, since, according to him, the consequences of the demise of Sino-Lithuanian relations could be damaging. The Member of the European Parliament claims that it is probable that the substitute for Chinese involvement in the Lithuanian economy could be incapable of being replicated. For instance, S. Jakeliūnas emphasizes China’s importance as an import partner since most of the components for the products assembled in Lithuania are shipped from the aforementioned Asian country.⁸³ Furthermore, the politician estimates that the benefits and trade figures of economic cooperation with China were not maximised. According to S. Jakeliūnas, it is doubtful that Lithuania will find trade partners or regions which could manage to replicate the trade figures that were achieved in cooperation with China, therefore the Lithuanian economy will certainly suffer because of the loss of China as a trading partner.

Interestingly, S. Jakeliūnas also discusses the responsibility for failed Sino-Lithuanian relations. The politician accuses the Government that one of its declared foreign policy features, such as a “values-based foreign policy” is applied selectively. S. Jakeliūnas questions why current Lithuanian political leaders are critical of, for example, China, while the United Arab Emirates, which were described by the Minister of Foreign Affairs G. Landsbergis as a country with a significant potential of economic cooperation for Lithuania, occupies a similar position in the index of democracy (which was not specified by S. Jakeliūnas).⁸⁴

⁸² LR Seimas. VIII (Pavasario) sesijos rytinio posėdžio Nr.413 stenograma. (2020/06/02). <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAK/b6cf11a0a57211eaa51db668f0092944>

⁸³ LR Seimas. III (Rudens) sesijos vakarinio posėdžio Nr.99 stenograma. (2021/09/30). <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAK/3a57d500229c11ecad9fbbf5f006237b>

⁸⁴ Ibid.

4.6. *Ramūnas Karbauskis*

Comments of economic origin are distinct in the rhetoric of Ramūnas Karbauskis. From the rhetoric of a former Member of Parliament, it is evident that the politician perceives economic collaboration with China as a beneficial aspect and frames Beijing as a lucrative partner. R. Karbauskis explains that, while the Lithuanian Government was revising Sino-Lithuanian relations, other countries enjoyed the benefits of bilateral relations with China. As claimed by the leader of Farmers and Greens Union as Lithuania is counting losses, others are profiting from the cooperation with China. In R. Karbauskis' words "China's diplomatic management in Latvia helps them to increase the load volumes in ports and other roads, increase business development".⁸⁵ R. Karbauskis believes that while Lithuania is economically isolated by China, because of the present circumstances, Beijing is publicly expressing contentment with improving economic relations in neighbouring countries such as Poland, Latvia and Estonia.⁸⁶

In the rhetoric of R. Karbauskis the importance of economic relations with China and China's status in the global economy is also discussed through its importance. The politician is concerned that, for instance, China's downgraded diplomatic ties with Lithuania will result in steep economic decline, since "the biggest market in the world is out of our reach – consequences will inevitably be felt by every citizen of Lithuania" and characterizes the situation as damaging.⁸⁷ In the opinion of the leader of Farmers and Greens Union, as he stated to a Chinese newspaper, the Global Times, in February of 2022, the consequences of demise of Sino-Lithuanian relations are already affecting the economy of the Baltic state. R. Karbauskis stated that problems are visible in sectors of various industries, "from the laser business to wood processors" and Lithuanian businesses and investors "urgently need to find new solutions"⁸⁸ In later comments expressed that "billions were taken out from the country's business and economy overnight"⁸⁹, arguing that the economy of the discussed Baltic state missed out on substantial investments and deals, for which the substitute was not even found - it might lead to such results as, the politician suggests, massive emigration. In the

⁸⁵ LVŽS. Ramūnas Karbauskis "Kodėl dabartinė liberali valdžia keršija tautai?". (2021/12/10).

<https://www.lvzs.lt/en/lvzsnaujienos/ramunas-karbauskis-kodel-dabartine-liberali-valdzia-keršija-tautai>

⁸⁶ LVŽS. Ramūnas Karbauskis "Valdantieji nesuvokia konflikto su Kinija pasekmių mūsų ekonomikai". (2022/01/24).

<https://www.lvzs.lt/lt/lvzsnaujienos/ramunas-karbauskis-valdantieji-nesuvokia-konflikto-su-kinija-pasekmiu-musu-ekonomikai>

⁸⁷ LVŽS. Ramūnas Karbauskis "Kodėl Gabrielius Landsbergis ir Žygimantas Pavilionis kariauja su Kinija?".

(2021/11/29). <https://www.lvzs.lt/lt/lvzsnaujienos/ramunas-karbauskis-kodel-gabrielius-landsbergis-ir-zygimantas-pavilionis-kariauja-su-kinija>

⁸⁸ Global Times. "Lithuanian government has made wrong decisions in worsening ties with China: opposition leader".

(2022/02/04). <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202202/1251390.shtml>

⁸⁹ Lrt.lt. "Karbauskis prašo Vyriausybės įgaliojimų derėtis su Kinija dėl santykių atkūrimo". (2022/02/17).

<https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/lietuvoje/2/1617743/karbauskis-praso-vyriausybes-igaliojimu-deretis-su-kinija-del-santykiu-atkurimo>

judgement of R. Karbauskis, Lithuania cannot even afford to clash with other countries. The politician explains that “our country is not as strong or as big <...> that it could withstand such an economic damage <...> which is so severe that it will take ages to eradicate the consequences”.⁹⁰ R. Karbauskis is also very critical of Taiwan’s potential to fill the gap left by China and sceptically estimates its capabilities. The politician labels Taiwan’s potential for Lithuanian market as a “fairy tale” and states “the statistics are miserable”.⁹¹

Chinese discursive power is also evident in R. Karbauskis’ rhetoric, which is visible through the search for responsibility for the demise of Sino-Lithuanian relations. The politician has used assertive comments towards the current government numerous times, regarding the managing of bilateral relations between Lithuania and China, and putting the blame on local leaders. The review of Lithuanian and Chinese bilateral relations conducted by the present government is labelled as a “confrontational foreign policy” by R. Karbauskis, since China was chosen as an enemy in an attempt to show support for Taiwan. The politician also directly blames one of the ruling parties in the Parliament - the Homeland Union - as it “demolished a long-standing diplomatic relations with China” and labels the current foreign policy, led by the leaders of aforementioned party as a “mistake”, “absurdity” as well as “belligerent, raising tensions and humiliating” from a Chinese viewpoint.⁹² Also, R. Karbauskis in his rhetoric asserts that the leaders of the Homeland Union enforced the current foreign policy, even though they recognised the possible cataclysmic outcomes and makes accusations that the current Government is continuously projecting a misleading communication about the situation. For instance, in discussion about the peculiar case of Taiwanese office in Vilnius the politician claims that “Lithuanian officials are lying that the adjustment of the title would not change anything”, albeit, in his opinion, it would.⁹³ It is worth mentioning that in the rhetoric of the politician there are no comments regarding China’s blame or involvement in the failure of Sino-Lithuanian relations.

Furthermore, R. Karbauskis defines Lithuania as an extraordinary case, regarding its relations with China. The politician believes that the Lithuanian government’s choice to review the bilateral relationship with China, which consequently resulted in its deterioration, is a unique

⁹⁰ Valstietis.lt. “R. Karbauskis kreipėsi į prezidentą: G. Landsbergis turi būti atstatyintas, kol dar nevelu“. (2022/01/05). <https://www.valstietis.lt/salyje/r-karbauskis-viesai-kreipesi-i-prezidenta-g-landsbergis-turi-buti-atstatyintas-kol-dar-nevelu/122992>

⁹¹ LVŽS. Ramūnas Karbauskis “Kam naudingi kvailiai valdžioje?“. (2022/04/25).

<https://www.lvzs.lt/lt/lvzsnaujienos/ramunas-karbauskis-kam-naudingi-kvailiai-valdzioje>

⁹² LVŽS. Ramūnas Karbauskis “Kodėl Gabrielius Landsbergis ir Žygimantas Pavilionis kariauja su Kinija?“. (2021/11/29). <https://www.lvzs.lt/lt/lvzsnaujienos/ramunas-karbauskis-kodel-gabrielius-landsbergis-ir-zygimantas-pavilionis-kariauja-su-kinija>

⁹³ Delfi.lt. “Karbauskis: “valstiečiai” susitiko su Kinijos atstovais ir gavo pasiūlymą, ką reikia daryti“. (2022/02/11). <https://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/lithuania/karbauskis-valstieciai-susitiko-su-kinijos-atstovais-ir-gavo-pasiulyma-ka-reikia-daryti.d?id=89435605>

circumstance in geopolitics. R. Karbauskis believes that it is improbable that any state will join Lithuania's path since, in his words, "we are seeing the reverse happening, especially in our neighbouring countries as Poland and Estonia are seeking new diplomatic solutions"⁹⁴ and explains that the current global trend displayed by other countries is the "strengthening of relations with China by practicing all possible diplomatic paths"⁹⁵. Also, commenting on the issue of Taiwanese representative office in Vilnius, politician highlighted the uniqueness of Lithuanian government's actions and proclaimed that although Taiwan has established its offices in other countries, Lithuania is the only one naming it under the title of Taiwan, not Taipei.⁹⁶

It must be mentioned that R. Karbauskis' in his comments reveals the motivations behind Lithuania's foreign policy course. The former Member of the Parliament believes that, in his words, Lithuania's inadequate behaviour towards China is influenced by an external power. R. Karbauskis accuses the United States for interfering and explains that "Lithuania is being used as a "guinea pig" to test China's reaction to various decisions"⁹⁷ since the United States recognise the underlying risks of such decisions and would not do deliberate harm for its economy.

Furthermore, in the rhetoric of R. Karbauskis the reiteration of China's core interest – sovereignty – is detectable. In the interview with Chinese "Global Times" the politician points out that Lithuania has signed various documents affirming China's territorial integrity and "agreed that the People's Republic of China is indivisible and has developed cooperation under agreed conditions".⁹⁸ In the same interview R. Karbauskis speculates that Lithuania has breached the framework of the agreement with China by making "wrong decisions" in pursuit of enhanced relationship with Taipei.

It is worth mentioning that in his rhetoric R. Karbauskis discusses Lithuanian support for Taiwan. The leader of Farmers and Greens Union is framing the support as excessive in his rhetoric and even harmful for Taiwan. The politician explains that Lithuania's escalation of the question of Taiwanese international recognition is affecting Taiwan's security guarantees therefore

⁹⁴ Global Times. "Lithuanian government has made wrong decisions in worsening ties with China: opposition leader". (2022/02/04). <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202202/1251390.shtml>

⁹⁵ LVŽS. Ramūnas Karbauskis "Kam naudingi kvailiai valdžioje?". (2022/04/25).

<https://www.lvzs.lt/lt/lvzsnaujienos/ramunas-karbauskis-kam-naudingi-kvailiai-valdžioje>

⁹⁶ LVŽS. Ramūnas Karbauskis "Kodėl Gabriėlius Landsbergis ir Žygimantas Pavilionis kariauja su Kinija?".

(2021/11/29). <https://www.lvzs.lt/lt/lvzsnaujienos/ramunas-karbauskis-kodel-gabrielius-landsbergis-ir-zygimantas-pavilionis-kariauja-su-kinija>

⁹⁷ Valstietis.lt. "R. Karbauskis kreipėsi į prezidentą: G. Landsbergis turi būti atstatydintas, kol dar nevēlu".

(2022/01/05). <https://www.valstietis.lt/salyje/r-karbauskis-viesai-kreipesi-i-prezidenta-g-landsbergis-turi-buti-atstatydintas-kol-dar-nevelu/122992>

⁹⁸ Global Times. "Lithuanian government has made wrong decisions in worsening ties with China: opposition leader". (2022/02/04). <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202202/1251390.shtml>

Lithuania should maintain friendlier relations with China on behalf of Taiwanese security.⁹⁹ In the view of R. Karbauskis, current Lithuanian political leaders do not comprehend the full picture of “Southeast Asian” geopolitics and are only escalating tensions between Beijing and Taipei – the politician even discusses what Lithuania should do in case it instigates a major conflict and China initiates military actions against Taiwan.¹⁰⁰

4.7. *Andrius Mazuronis*

In the rhetoric of Andrius Mazuronis the economic topics are also discussed and the politician emphasizes China’s importance for Lithuanian economy, since, according to him, the consequences of deterioration of Sino-Lithuanian relations will be unfortunate. The Member of the Parliament explains that the losses caused by the failure of bilateral relations with China are too costly. A. Mazuronis emphasized the fact that China holds a crucial position in the global economy since it is a key actor in the majority of supply chains. In the opinion of A. Mazuronis “the economies, the manufacturing processes, logistics lines are so integrated globally that losing it will cost substantial amounts” and adds that there are no long-term prospects in that regard.¹⁰¹ In his rhetoric the politician emotionally questions the apparent circumstances and states that it got too expensive since, in A. Mazuronis view, the aforementioned situation makes it immensely difficult for Lithuania’s economy and citizens to endure.¹⁰² The Member of the Parliament even argues that because of the current crisis the prosperous future of Lithuania and its citizens is at a vulnerable position. Accordingly, A. Mazuronis raises rhetorical questions about diminished prospects for Lithuania to make progress in such fields as healthcare or the education system.

Also, interestingly, A. Mazuronis in his rhetoric discusses the support for Taiwan, articulated by some Lithuanian politicians. A. Mazuronis frames his views by projecting a message that Taiwan does not need excessive Lithuanian support since Taiwan, in his opinion, is not even voicing serious declarations for its independence. In the words of the politician, Taiwan is not showing the leadership regarding independence aspirations, therefore “we should not drag Taiwan

⁹⁹ Valstietis.lt. “R. Karbauskis kreipėsi į prezidentą: G. Landsbergis turi būti atstatydingas, kol dar nevelu“. (2022/01/05). <https://www.valstietis.lt/salyje/r-karbauskis-viesai-kreipesi-i-prezidenta-g-landsbergis-turi-buti-atstatydingas-kol-dar-nevelu/122992>

¹⁰⁰ LVŽS. Ramūnas Karbauskis “Kodėl Gabrielius Landsbergis ir Žygimantas Pavilionis kariauja su Kinija?“. (2021/11/29). <https://www.lvzs.lt/lt/lvzsnaujienos/ramunas-karbauskis-kodel-gabrielius-landsbergis-ir-zygimantas-pavilionis-kariauja-su-kinija>

¹⁰¹ Žinių Radijas “Opozicija“ (2022/01/07). <https://www.ziniuradijas.lt/laidos/opozicija/kaip-opozicija-mato-santykius-su-kinija>

¹⁰² LR Seimas. III (Rudens) sesijos rytinio posėdžio Nr.130 stenograma. (2021/12/23). <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAK/096b0e90641311ecb2fe9975f8a9e52e>

along to be more Taiwanese than Taiwanese people themselves”.¹⁰³ A. Mazuronis even frames Lithuania’s proactivity as unfavourable for Taiwan since the Baltic country is raising the question of Taiwanese international recognition more than Taipei would like to, therefore the politician claims that Vilnius is advocating for Taiwan to a greater extent than it is necessary.¹⁰⁴

Furthermore, the politician recognizes Lithuania as an unprecedented case in the global geopolitics regarding its relations with China. A. Mazuronis in his rhetoric highlights the fact that other countries did select less controversial naming customs for the offices that represent Taiwan.¹⁰⁵ The Member of the Parliament claims that Lithuania does indeed receive support from its allies for its foreign policy towards China. Despite that, A. Mazuronis suggests that the supporting countries are not taking any political risks themselves and are balancing their bilateral relations with China. For instance, although Lithuania is praised for being an “icebreaker” by its partners but the same partners “are increasing its trade volumes with China”.¹⁰⁶

4.8. *Gitanas Nausėda*

In the rhetoric of Gitanas Nausėda, the economic aspect is evident through the highlighting China’s economic capabilities. The incumbent President of Lithuania did acknowledge the positive influence and effects of cooperation with China. In his greeting to the 71st anniversary of the People’s Republic of China, G. Nausėda characterized the bilateral relations between Lithuania and China as “mutually beneficial”.¹⁰⁷ The President’s Office did highlight the benefits of cooperating with China through displayed willingness of improved economic relations. When China applied its retaliation measures to Lithuania, mainly because of the Taiwanese Representative Office in Vilnius controversy, President’s advisor Asta Skaisgirytė recognised the advantage of retaining constructive relations with Beijing and benefits for Lithuania. Although China has allegedly imposed strict sanctions against the Baltic country A. Skaisgirytė displayed an aspiration that “bilateral relations would return to a level of diplomatic relations for us to cooperate as much as

¹⁰³ Diena.lt. “A.Mazuronis: progos pasisakyti Taivano klausimu parlamentarai neturėjo“. (2021/12/03). <https://m.diena.lt/naujienos/lietuva/politika/mazuronis-progos-pasisakyti-taivano-klausimu-parlamentarai-neturejo-1054019>

¹⁰⁴ Žinių Radijas “Opozicija“ (2022/01/07). <https://www.ziniuradijas.lt/laidos/opozicija/kaip-opozicija-mato-santykius-su-kinija>

¹⁰⁵ Lrt.lt. “Mazuronis: reikia ieškoti būdų pakeisti Taivaniečių atstovybės pavadinimą“. (2022/01/07). <https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/lietuvoje/2/1582838/mazuronis-reikia-ieskoti-budu-pakeisti-taivanieciu-atstovybes-pavadinima>

¹⁰⁶ Žinių Radijas “Opozicija“ (2022/01/07). <https://www.ziniuradijas.lt/laidos/opozicija/kaip-opozicija-mato-santykius-su-kinija>

¹⁰⁷ Gitanas Nausėda Twitter account. (2020/10/01). <https://twitter.com/gitanasnauseda/status/1311529633268064256>

possible economically”.¹⁰⁸ Additionally, G. Nausėda indirectly asserted that because of the ongoing situation Lithuania lost out on possible investments. After the discussion about the demise of Sino-Lithuanian relations with Lithuanian business representatives the Lithuanian President told to the media that current situation is not benevolent for Lithuanian economy, since the lack of efforts to “create workplaces or to enlarge profits” is shown.¹⁰⁹

Furthermore, in the rhetoric of G. Nausėda the search for responsibility for damaged bilateral relations between China and Lithuania is distinguishable. The President is critical of the current government and asserts that it made such decisions that are affecting the Sino-Lithuanian relations. G. Nausėda berated the Government for the decision to authorize the opening of Taiwanese Representative Office in Vilnius under the disputed title of Taiwan and not Taipei. The incumbent President even labelled the decision as a “mistake” and “the main spark” of altercation with China.¹¹⁰ Also, in his third annual speech to the Parliament G. Nausėda indirectly implied that the current situation is the result of current political leadership in the Government. The President stated that “until recently Lithuanian businessmen were encouraged to develop cooperation with Chinese companies” by accentuating present foreign policy.¹¹¹ It must be mentioned that in his yearly address the politician indirectly even accused the current executive power of not acknowledging the unsatisfactory effects of its implanted policies by suggesting that the current leaders encouraged the victims of Chinese retaliation “to keep being silent and suffer a bit”. Also, the President has indirectly implied that current political leaders do not adopt decisions that are beneficial for the state, since “empathy for our business was not shown”. G. Nausėda criticised the current Government by suggesting that it acted by not understanding the entire perspective of the implications of the executed foreign policy towards China. The politician vividly described the situation as “climbing into the sky <...> without seeing what we are standing on”.¹¹²

¹⁰⁸ Made in Vilnius. “A. Skaisgirytė: gavome patikinimą, kad vokiškos kompanijos dėl Kinijos spaudimo iš Lietuvos nesitrauks“. (2022/02/10). <https://madeinvilnius.lt/verslas/vilniaus-rinka/a-skaisgiryte-gavome-patikinima-kad-vokiskos-kompanijos-del-kinijos-spaudimo-is-lietuvos-nesitrauks/>

¹⁰⁹ Lrt.lt. “Kristijonas Vizbaras apie situaciją su Kinija: mes buvome paaukoti dėl vertybinės politikos“. (2022/01/19). <https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/verslas/4/1592377/kristijonas-vizbaras-apie-situacija-su-kinija-mes-buvome-paaukoti-del-vertybines-politikos>

¹¹⁰ Žinių Radijas. “Prezidentas: klaida – ne Taivaniečių atstovybės atidarymas, o jos pavadinimas“. (2022/01/04). <https://www.vz.lt/verslo-aplinka/2022/01/04/prezidentas-klaida--ne-taivanieciu-atstovybes-atidarymas-o-jos-pavadinimas>

¹¹¹ 15min.lt. “Trečiasis prezidento G. Nausėdos metinis pranešimas“. (2022/06/16). <https://www.15min.lt/naujiena/aktualu/lietuva/treciasis-prezidento-g-nausedos-metinis-pranesimas-56-1694540>

¹¹² Lrt.lt. “Kristijonas Vizbaras apie situaciją su Kinija: mes buvome paaukoti dėl vertybinės politikos“. (2022/01/19). <https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/verslas/4/1592377/kristijonas-vizbaras-apie-situacija-su-kinija-mes-buvome-paaukoti-del-vertybines-politikos>

4.9. Gintautas Paluckas

In Gintautas Paluckas' rhetoric it is evident that the politician understands the current government's position on China-related questions as a stand out case. In his opinion, the geopolitical line, chosen by Lithuania, does not fit into the context of other Western nations that recognize the particularity of Taiwan's status and choose to maintain unofficial economic, trade and other forms of relations to keep in line with China. Former leader of the Social Democratic party explains that the Lithuanian government's intentions to open up a representative office in Taiwan could be understood as an expression of official diplomatic relations between Vilnius and Taipei, which is a rarity in global context. G. Paluckas explains that "only sixteen countries have formal diplomatic relations with Taiwan – Honduras, <...> Belize, Tuvalu and... Lithuania is planning to join the list".¹¹³ The politician also specifies that Lithuania is an unprecedented case between its allies and no other state is planning to emulate or support Vilnius confrontation with Beijing by making an assumption that other countries are clever enough not to clash with China (*The European Union is governed by more thoughtful politicians who are in no hurry to go to economic war with China*¹¹⁴). G. Paluckas reminds, that all other European states, unlike Lithuania, choose to open up representative offices under the name of Taipei.¹¹⁵

Moreover, G. Paluckas argues the responsibility for the collapse of Sino-Lithuanian relations. G. Paluckas argues that certain narratives are being shaped in the Lithuanian information ecosystem, regarding China's fault for the decline of Sino-Lithuanian relations. As claimed by the politician, "contrary to what is trying to be told, whatever China is, it has not attacked us"¹¹⁶, therefore G. Paluckas seemingly suggests that current circumstances is a consequence of policies executed by the current government, since the politician describes the present political leaders as people "who are involved in confrontations all over the world and fight for whatever they want, but not for Lithuania"¹¹⁷. The member of the Parliament argues that Lithuania is initiating the fall back between China and Lithuania and even declaring the alienation from China through official means. G. Paluckas suggests that the decision to recall Lithuania's acting temporary *chargé d'affaires* for consultations was a sign of "de facto breaking off the diplomatic relations between the countries,

¹¹³ LSDP. Gintautas Paluckas "Konservatoriai yra Karo partija". (2021/08/13). <https://www.lsdp.lt/gintautas-paluckas-konservatoriai-yra-karo-partija/>

¹¹⁴ Udiena.lt, Gintautas Paluckas "Kada Lietuvoje baigsis karas?". (2022/01/28). https://udiena.lt/uncategorized/kada-lietuvoje-baigsis-karas/?fbclid=IwAR2uvKk15tU1orvFNUD0-JPjjq4X9nTOW73IQct_hbeukkyQnOb49dwFcMw

¹¹⁵ TV3.lt "Dienos pjūvis". (2022/01/26). <https://www.tv3.lt/naujiena/lietuva/andrius-kubilius-isitikines-klysta-ne-lietuvos-vyriausybe-o-kinija-bei-opozicija-n1135906>

¹¹⁶ Udiena.lt, Gintautas Paluckas "Kada Lietuvoje baigsis karas?". (2022/01/28). https://udiena.lt/uncategorized/kada-lietuvoje-baigsis-karas/?fbclid=IwAR2uvKk15tU1orvFNUD0-JPjjq4X9nTOW73IQct_hbeukkyQnOb49dwFcMw

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

since they are maintained by diplomats”.¹¹⁸ The politician scolds the government for launching the Taiwanese office in Vilnius in a controversial name, labelling the decision as “foolish” and, in other words, provoking.¹¹⁹ It is worth mentioning, that G. Paluckas specifically criticises the Homeland Union party, for acting unilaterally on Taiwanese office issue and for its outlook on modern China, since, in his view, the politicians from the aforementioned Homeland Union party shape inaccurate views on China and “perceive China as a single axis of evil with Russia, which should be fought with the same means”¹²⁰. In his rhetoric G. Paluckas generalizes the review of Lithuania’s bilateral relationship with China conducted by the current government as a choice of taking part in a “modern cold war concept” and even as a “declaration of pointless diplomatic war”.¹²¹ G. Paluckas even frames Lithuania’s foreign policy as selective, since, in his opinion, judgement of Lithuanian officials is inconsistent. The politician states that the Minister of Foreign affairs is picking exclusively on China and questions why Lithuania choose to ignore other countries, such as Singapore or Vietnam, on which alleged human rights violations are also reported.¹²²

G. Paluckas also in his rhetoric does clarify that China should be collaborated with and it should not be treated as an “axis of evil” as it is, in his view, by one of the ruling parties. The politician explains that “China should be involved into the multi-layered structure of the world <...> it will not be an achievement if China is isolated in the international community”¹²³

Moreover, it is evident that G. Paluckas discusses the Chinese core interests, such as its sovereignty. The politician, commenting on negative China’s reaction and possible repercussions after the opening of the Taiwanese Representative Office, which, in its name, uses an adjective that allegedly, interferes with Beijing’s sovereignty claims, as well as giving his thoughts on pro-Taiwanese discourse, apparent between politicians of the ruling majority in the Parliament, commented that Lithuania is projecting ambiguity towards China’s complex sovereignty model and not respecting globally acknowledged principles. G. Paluckas points out that “regarding China, we communicate that we respect the “One-China Principle” <...> although we also simultaneously

¹¹⁸ LR Seimas, G. Paluckas press release “Įvertino sprendimą dėl diplomatų atšaukimo iš Kinijos: tai, ką daro Gabrielius Landsbergis – bejėgiška ir skandalinga“. (2021/12/16).

https://www.lrs.lt/sip/portal.show?p_r=36002&p_k=1&p_t=279347

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Lrt.lt “Paluckas abejoja susitarimo dėl užsienio politikos perspektyvomis: daugybė nuostatų akivaizdžiai ideologizuotos“. (2022/05/20). <https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/lietuvoje/2/1698915/paluckas-abejoja-susitarimo-del-uzsienio-politikos-perspektyvomis-daugybe-nuostatu-akivaizdziai-ideologizuotos>

¹²¹ LSDP, Gintautas Paluckas “Konservatoriai yra Karo partija“. (2021/08/13). <https://www.lsdp.lt/gintautas-paluckas-konservatoriai-yra-karo-partija/>

¹²² LSDP. “V. Blinkėvičiūtė – po socialdemokratų susitikimo su G. Landsbergiu: išgirdau tik tuščius pažadus“. (2022/02/17). <https://www.lsdp.lt/v-blinkeviciute-po-socialdemokratu-susitikimo-su-g-landsbergiu-isgirdau-tik-tuscius-pazadus/>

¹²³ Lrt.lt “Paluckas apie Lietuvos santykius su Kinija: pasirinkome dalyvauti šaltojo karo apkasuose“. (2021/12/10). <https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/pasaulyje/6/1561450/paluckas-apie-lietuvos-santykius-su-kinija-pasirinkome-dalyvauti-saltojo-karo-apkasuose>

discuss about Taiwan and its indisputable right to decide democratically on its independence and so on”.¹²⁴ According to G. Paluckas, the conditions of aforementioned principle, which in the politician’s words are understood as “not recognising any ethnic or political separatism”¹²⁵ are genuinely respected between the great powers of the world.

Also in G. Paluckas comments it is evident that the politician also highlights China’s importance for Lithuania. The politician critically assesses the government’s policy of diversification of its markets to replace China. For instance, G. Paluckas claims that idea of Taiwanese market successfully replacing China is absurd and even categorizes such claims as an “illusion, in which we bog down too much”.¹²⁶ The politician is certain that weakened economic relations between Lithuania and China as well as diplomatic uncertainty will result in a period of economic recession for the Baltic country (“we will have “chronic inflammation” in our economy, in our business environment”).¹²⁷

4.10. *Viktoras Pranckietis*

In the rhetoric of Viktoras Pranckietis the comments in which China is described as not a threat to Lithuania are detectable. The former Speaker of the Parliament did not perceive China as a major threat to Lithuania’s security after the Asian country was for the first time directly labelled in The National Threat Assessment as such. V. Pranckietis did not perceive China as a direct threat and explained that Beijing should not be feared. The politician explained that the Chinese officials have convinced him in the past that the most populous country in the world does not have any goals that would contradict any of Lithuania’s national interests.¹²⁸ The politician even portrays China as a peaceful and responsible major power that is concerned about its partner. According to V. Pranckietis, Chinese officials propose a model of mutually beneficial and peaceful collaboration by caring not only about the interests of China but the interests of the receiving

¹²⁴ Lrt.lt “Paluckas abejoja susitarimo dėl užsienio politikos perspektyvomis: daugybė nuostatų akivaizdžiai ideologizuotos“. (2022/05/20). <https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/lietuvoje/2/1698915/paluckas-abejoja-susitarimo-del-uzsienio-politikos-perspektyvomis-daugybe-nuostatu-akivaizdziai-ideologizuotos>

¹²⁵ LSDP, Gintautas Paluckas “Konservatoriai yra Karo partija“. (2021/08/13). <https://www.lsdp.lt/gintautas-paluckas-konservatoriai-yra-karo-partija/>

¹²⁶ Lrt.lt “Paluckas apie Lietuvos santykius su Kinija: pasirinkome dalyvauti šaltojo karo apkasuose“. (2021/12/10). <https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/pasaulyje/6/1561450/paluckas-apie-lietuvos-santykius-su-kinija-pasirinkome-dalyvauti-saltojo-karo-apkasuose>

¹²⁷ TV3.lt “Dienos pjūvis“. (2022/01/26). <https://www.tv3.lt/naujiena/lietuva/andrius-kubilius-isitikines-klysta-ne-lietuvos-vyriausybe-o-kinija-bei-opozicija-n1135906>

¹²⁸ Lrt.lt. “V. Pranckietis Kinijos grėsmės nesibaimina: ją reikia matyti kaip prekybos partnerę“. (2019/02/06). <https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/lietuvoje/2/244203/v-pranckietis-kinijos-gresmes-nesibaimina-ja-reikia-matyti-kaip-prekybos-partnere>

country as well, therefore despite the security risks highlighted by the state security agencies, China should be seen as an economic partner.¹²⁹

Furthermore, in the rhetoric of V. Pranckietis the reiteration of Chinese sovereignty interests is evident. The former Speaker of the Parliament in his tenure has prohibited the former Member of the Parliament, Mantas Adomėnas, to organise the discussion about the democracy challenges, in which independent experts and analysts from Taiwan were invited. According to V. Pranckietis, such a discussion would undermine the, in his words, “One-China policy”. The politician claims that Lithuania follows the aforementioned policy and the authorisation of such a discussion could be a precedent of international relations.¹³⁰ It is worth mentioning that the former Speaker of the Parliament suggested that such a discussion could be arranged outside the Parliament.

4.11. *Artūras Skardžius*

In the rhetoric of Artūras Skardžius the economy related topics on China are evident as well. In comments of the politician China is described as a lucrative partner since in his rhetoric A. Skardžius displays appreciation for Chinese economic prowess. In the event of the 70th anniversary of the People’s Republic of China event the politician emphasized China’s importance for the global economy and underlined the importance of intensifying bilateral relations with China.¹³¹ Also, it is worth mentioning that A. Skardžius highlights Chinese investments and abilities in constructing the critical transport infrastructure in various countries. In one of the parliamentary discussions about the financing of the road maintenance and development programme the politician praised China’s involvement in, according to A. Skardžius, excellently renovating the roads of Croatia and Poland.¹³²

Interestingly, from A. Skardžius’ parliamentary comments it is evident that he does not frame China as an oppressive state. In the plenary sittings the politician contradicted the current Minister of the Environment, Simonas Gentvilas, since the latter described China as a totalitarian

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ 15min.lt. “M. Adomėnui neleido surengti konferencijos Seime: nenorėjo pykdyti Pekino“. (2019/04/18). <https://www.15min.lt/naujiena/aktualu/lietuva/m-adomenui-neleido-surengti-konferencijos-seime-nenorejo-supykdyti-pekino-56-1132754>

¹³¹ Lrytas.lt. “Prieštaringame Kinijos 70-mečio minėjime: ir mitingas, ir žinomi Lietuvos politikai“. (2019/09/30). <https://www.lrytas.lt/lietuvsdiena/aktualijos/2019/09/30/news/priestaringame-kinijos-70-mecio-minejime-ir-mitingas-ir-zinomi-politikos-veidai-12011310>

¹³² LR Seimas. III (Rudens) sesijos rytinio posėdžio Nr.103 stenograma. (2021/10/14). <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAK/7f0a63802d9f11ec99bbc1b08701c7f8>

state while discussing its “social credit” system. A. Skardžius expressed a sentiment that this type of characterisations should not be utilised when describing China or its state system.¹³³

4.12. *Saulius Skvernelis*

In the rhetoric of Saulius Skvernelis, China-related comments of economic origin are most abundant. During the late period of his Prime Minister tenure, S. Skvernelis did aim for closer economic relations with China and in his rhetoric recognition of prospects that would result from cooperation with China are noticeable. During the meeting with Zhifei Shen, a Chinese ambassador to Lithuania, S. Skvernelis expressed the significance of China as a partner for Lithuania. (“China undoubtedly is our most important trading partner in Asia. <...> The Government seeks to expand cooperation with China in freight transit, agriculture, financial technology, tourism, science and culture”.¹³⁴). At the high-level plenary session of 16+1 summit in Dubrovnik the former Prime Minister also appreciated the Chinese regional cooperation initiatives as strengthening cooperation between countries in various industries and yet again highlighted the necessity to expand collaboration and exchange of good practices.¹³⁵ S. Skvernelis indeed emphasized the benefit of more intense bilateral relations between Lithuania and China (“I hope that EU and China will continue a successful dialogue, which will strengthen our cooperation and outline further prospects for a mutually beneficial partnership. I welcome the friendly and stable relations between China and Lithuania. I believe that we will continue to do our utmost for the well-being of our people in the future”¹³⁶) and sent the message that Lithuania is ready for expanded collaboration¹³⁷. Therefore, in the late period of incumbency attraction to economic prospects that could be achieved through the cooperation with China are distinct in the rhetoric of former Prime Minister S. Skvernelis.

Also, S. Skvernelis has appreciated that China can be a peaceful and unthreatening partner. The politician publicly dismissed claims of China’s acute interference and pointed out that the fears are exaggerated, in some sense (“we certainly do not have any pressure, and we certainly do not have any blackmail tool, from technological to other things”¹³⁸).

¹³³ LR Seimas. VI (Pavasario) sesijos rytinio posėdžio Nr.278 stenograma. (2019/04/25). <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAK/1f20bda067e211e99684a7f33a9827ac>

¹³⁴ Lietuvos Respublikos Vyriausybė “Premjeras: Kinija - svarbiausia prekybos partnerė Azijoje“. (2019/03/20). <https://lrv.lt/lt/naujienos/premjeras-kinija-svarbiausia-prekybos-partnere-azijoje-1>

¹³⁵ Lietuvos Respublikos Vyriausybė “Premjeras S. Skvernelis: Kinijos rinka atveriamą lietuviškai žemės ūkio produkcijai“. (2019/04/12). <https://lrv.lt/lt/naujienos/premjeras-s-skvernelis-kinijos-rinka-atveriamą-lietuviskai-zemes-ukio-produkcijai>

¹³⁶ Lietuvos Respublikos Vyriausybė “Premjeras sveikina Kiniją Naujųjų metų proga“. (2020/01/25). <https://lrv.lt/lt/naujienos/premjeras-sveikina-kinija-naujuju-metu-proga>

¹³⁷ Saulius Skvernelis Facebook account (2019/04/12). <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100044241978848>

¹³⁸ TV3.lt “Karštai su tv3.lt“ (2021/12/20). <https://www.tv3.lt/naujiena/zmones/saulius-skvernelis-apie-lietuvos-santykius-su-kinija-sokome-i-atvira-konflikta-ten-kur-nereikejo-n1130086>

After the Sino-Lithuanian relations have visibly deteriorated, the rhetoric of S. Skvernelis on China-related questions has evidently changed. When China imposed the unannounced economic sanctions for the Baltic country, expressions that could be explained as accentuating China's importance for Lithuania, are detectable. S. Skvernelis questioned how in current conditions supply of essential products and components from China will be ensured.¹³⁹ From the politician's statements it can be understood that due to its status in global economy, China is an integral part of Lithuania's economic well-being because the deterioration will result in colossal losses, which will be suffered by the Lithuanian population. S. Skvernelis describes the possible losses by emphasizing, in his opinion, worsened economic conditions for his fellow compatriots, which was created as a consequence of collapsed bilateral relations ("The losses incurred are several hundred million euros that have not been acquired into our budget. If half a million people in Lithuania cannot live warmly this year because they do not have enough money for <...> energy resources, then there is no value here. <...> The funds that we plan to allocate to subsidise state-owned enterprises, should be better given to people <...> so they could eat well and clothe their children"¹⁴⁰). S. Skvernelis forecasted a steep decline for Lithuanian economy and pointed out that on-going conflict will leave a tremendous void in economy, by asking "how taxes are going to be paid into budget and on what people are going to live on".¹⁴¹

Also, in the rhetoric of S. Skvernelis the search of responsibility for the demise of Sino-Lithuanian relations is evident. Former Prime Minister in his comments explains that the current government is directly responsible for the declined bilateral relations between Vilnius and Beijing. For instance, after the failure to extinguish the major controversy of Taiwanese office in Vilnius the politician states that "we are apparently saying that we will not have any diplomatic relations with China and apparently just putting an end to it".¹⁴² In his rhetoric S. Skvernelis directly implies that the current government should not "cause problems, but should choose the diplomatic way"¹⁴³ in order to mitigate the consequences of deteriorated bilateral relations. The politician also illustrates the situation by framing Lithuania as standing out as an "unprecedented case" in geopolitics. For example, S. Skvernelis points out that "we chose this way, while other

¹³⁹ LR Seimas, Democratic faction "Vardan Lietuvos" press release "Saulius Skvernelis apie Lietuvos santykius su Kinija: kyla daug klausimų, prie ko tai prives". (2021/09/16).

https://www.lrs.lt/sip/portal.show?p_r=35715&p_k=1&p_t=277977

¹⁴⁰ TV3.lt "Karštai su tv3.lt" (2021/12/20). <https://www.tv3.lt/naujiena/zmones/saulius-skvernelis-apie-lietuvos-santykius-su-kinija-sokome-i-atvira-konflikta-ten-kur-neriekejo-n1130086>

¹⁴¹ Diena.lt "S.Skvernelis apie valdžios konfliktą su Kinija: jiems nerūpi mūsų verslas ir iš ko gyvens žmonės". (2021/12/20). <https://m.diena.lt/naujienos/verslas/ekonomika/s-skvernelis-apie-valdzios-konflikta-su-kinija-jiems-nerupi-musu-verslas-ir-ko-gyvens-zmones-1056389>

¹⁴² Žinių Radijas "Opozicija" (2021/11/19). <https://www.ziniuradijas.lt/laidos/opozicija/s-skvernelis-matyt-dedame-taska-ir-su-kinija-neturesime-jokiu-diplomatiniu-santykiu?video=1>

¹⁴³ LR Seimas, Democratic faction "Vardan Lietuvos" press release "Saulius Skvernelis apie Lietuvos santykius su Kinija: kyla daug klausimų, prie ko tai prives". (2021/09/16).

https://www.lrs.lt/sip/portal.show?p_r=35715&p_k=1&p_t=277977

countries chose another way”¹⁴⁴ and “we should acknowledge how other countries are dealing with China”¹⁴⁵. It is worth mentioning that in the rhetoric of the politician there are no comments regarding China’s blame or involvement in the failure of Sino-Lithuanian relations.

It is evident that S. Skvernelis in his rhetoric also reiterates major interests of China. The politician, commenting on negative China’s reaction and possible repercussions after the opening of the Taiwanese Representative Office, which, in its name, uses an adjective that allegedly, interferes with Beijing’s sovereignty claims, commented that “consequences are clear – China is just simply defending the “One-China principle”¹⁴⁶. The former Prime Minister even labelled the opening of the Taiwanese office with a controversial title as a “mistake” and disclosed that, for example, in his tenure the government discussed about the possibility of opening a representative office under the name of Taipei, which would not cross China’s interests.¹⁴⁷ S. Skvernelis also has expressed rhetoric that is in line with core Chinese interests, on exclusion of Taiwan from the World Health Organisation, since the politician stated that “he does not see any way”¹⁴⁸ by which Lithuania could take leadership in order to support Taiwan’s bid for admission into the organisation. Also, S. Skvernelis indirectly criticised the on-going campaign of strengthening relations with Taiwan, carried out by current government, explaining that it should not be executed by undermining the interests and opinions of Lithuanian citizens.¹⁴⁹

4.13. *Giedrius Surplys*

In the rhetoric of Giedrius Surplys the comments of economic nature are abundant through the attraction to China’s economic capabilities. It is evident that the politician recognizes China as a provider of economic benefits. In the article in which the politician discusses the necessity to create a definite strategy of relations with China, G. Surplys provides success stories of prosperous cooperation with China and claims that Lithuania should follow the model of Ireland and Slovakia as these countries, in his opinion, are regarded as model examples of successful economic cooperation with China. G. Surplys explains that Ireland and Slovakia managed to

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ TV3.lt “Karštai su tv3.lt“ (2021/12/20). <https://www.tv3.lt/naujiena/zmones/saulius-skvernelis-apie-lietuvos-santykius-su-kinija-sokome-i-atvira-konflikta-ten-kur-neriekejo-n1130086>

¹⁴⁶ Žinių Radijas “Opozicija“ (2021/11/19). <https://www.ziniuradijas.lt/laidos/opozicija/s-skvernelis-matyt-dedame-taska-ir-su-kinija-neturesime-jokiu-diplomatiniu-santykiu?video=1>

¹⁴⁷ Lrytas.lt “S. Skvernelis kritiškai vertina tai, kaip sprendžiama situacija dėl Kinijos: tai yra visiškai nesuderinamas“. (2022/01/21). <https://www.lrytas.lt/lietuvosdiena/aktualijos/2022/01/21/news/s-skvernelis-kritiskai-vertina-tai-kaip-sprendžiama-situacija-del-kinijos-tai-yra-visiskas-nesusipratimas-22129271>

¹⁴⁸ LR Seimas. VIII (Pavasario) sesijos rytinio posėdžio Nr.422 stenograma. (2020/06/18). <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAK/00a936f0b16e11ea9a12d0dada3ca61b>

¹⁴⁹ TV3.lt “Karštai su tv3.lt“ (2021/12/20). <https://www.tv3.lt/naujiena/zmones/saulius-skvernelis-apie-lietuvos-santykius-su-kinija-sokome-i-atvira-konflikta-ten-kur-neriekejo-n1130086>

achieve a positive balance in trade with China and the numbers are booming. The politician suggests that Lithuania could even re-evaluate its showcased principles regarding China by quoting former Irish ambassador to China, Eoin O’Leary that “he does not believe in the megaphone diplomacy”, in order to exploit the potential benefits of cooperation with Beijing.¹⁵⁰ Also, in general, G. Surplys emphasizes the importance of China in worldwide economy and its role in the global supply chains and defines China as “a fast-growing giant building on higher education and future technologies”.¹⁵¹ The Member of the Parliament in his rhetoric suggests that sustainable and more intense trade relations could be developed with “a second economy in the world”.

Also, G. Surplys highlights the potential losses for economy, caused by deterioration of Sino-Lithuanian relations, since the on-going altercation with Beijing, in his opinion, should be costly for Vilnius. The politician perceives the loss of economic relations with China as a horrendous situation for Lithuanian economy. As G. Surplys explained in January of 2022, the situation in Lithuanian business sector is already catastrophic and investors are even planning to take such extreme measures as closing their factories – the politician estimates that the coverage of losses could require 300 million Euros annually, while long-term GDP losses are even more difficult to approximate.¹⁵² G. Surplys in his rhetoric illustrates that Lithuania cannot even afford to withstand such economic damage since the resulting void of decreased trade relations cannot be easily substituted since in his opinion the Government does not suggest any alternatives.¹⁵³ Accordingly, the situation will result in bigger taxes as well as reduced revenue to the budget.

Moreover, G. Surplys understands the demise of Sino-Lithuanian relations as an extraordinary case in the geopolitics. In the opinion of the politician, the case of the Taiwanese Representative Office in Vilnius could have been resolved differently and highlights the fact that other countries chose a less controversial naming option of the office by illustrating through the example that “the entire world is acting differently”¹⁵⁴. G. Surplys even diminishes the Government’s position by arguing that authorization of such name of the representative office is an aspiration to stand out and be “unique”. Also, G. Surplys illustrates the situation as so unprecedented that it possibly irritated the allies of Lithuania. According to the politician, “foreign

¹⁵⁰ Delfi.lt. “Giedrius Surplys. Lietuva-Kinija: kaip (ne)bendrausime su milžinu titano kojomis“. (2021/05/25). <https://www.delfi.lt/news/ringas/politics/giedrius-surplys-lietuva-kinija-kaip-nebendrausime-su-milziniu-titano-kojomis.d?id=87275563>

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² LVŽS. Giedrius Surplys “O juk visiškai nieko ypatingo Lietuvoje neatsitiko, tik žmonės iš Taivano salos norėjo save vadinti taivaniečiais“. (2022/01/17). <https://www.lvzs.lt/lt/lvzsnaujienos/giedrius-surplys-„o-juk-visiskai-nieko-ypatingo-lietuvoje-neatsitiko,-tik-zmones-iss-taivano-salos-norejo-save-vadinti-taivanieciais>

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Žinių Radijas. “Dienos klausimas – Ar bandyti taikytis su Kinija?“ (2022/01/05) <https://www.ziniuradijas.lt/laidos/dienos-klausimas/ar-bandyti-taikytis-su-kinija?video=1>

partners are not very happy” about the rebellious act of the Baltic country, which only causes unnecessary problems.¹⁵⁵

In addition, G. Surplys, as his colleague in the Farmers and Greens Union, R. Karbauskis, is discussing Lithuania’s responsibility in the dispute between Lithuania and China. Yet again, the politician touches on the topic of the Taiwanese Representative Office by describing it as the main issue regarding worsened diplomatic relations between Beijing and Vilnius. The Member of the Parliament attributes the blame for the current Government as, in his judgement, “touched the most irritating subject” for the most populous country in the world. G. Surplys criticises the Government by labelling their decision to authorize the use of the name Taiwan as a “mistake” and amusingly illustrates the decision as “throwing off a banana peel under its feet”.¹⁵⁶ Interestingly, in his rhetoric the politician uses Chinese sociological aspects by explaining that the foreign policy decisions executed by the Government is making Lithuania “lose its face”.¹⁵⁷ Also, it is worth mentioning, that the politician makes various accusations for current political leaders, regarding the current diplomatic dispute with China. G. Surplys claims that China-related decisions, that have proven to be unfavourable for the country, unilaterally were executed by the governing coalition of the Parliament which, in his words, admitted that the possible consequences of the executed policies were not even thoroughly considered.¹⁵⁸ Additionally, according to G. Surplys, the current political leaders are deliberately projecting misleading information about China’s judgement of Lithuania’s revision of its bilateral relations with China. G. Surplys states that the politicians of the ruling coalition are “constantly lying” by stating that the Chinese retaliation measures is not a result of a Taiwanese office title controversy, but a consequence of Lithuania’s hesitance to participate in China’s multinational structures or cooperate with Chinese companies in the field of communications.¹⁵⁹ Also, it is important to mention that the politician does not discuss Chinese involvement regarding worsened bilateral relations between China and Lithuania.

Furthermore, in his comments G. Surplys reiterates Chinese sovereignty interests. The politician does repeat the Chinese narratives that Lithuania indeed interferes with Beijing’s “One-China Principle”. The Member of the Parliament explains that Lithuania has signed various treaties

¹⁵⁵ LVŽS. Giedrius Surplys “O juk visiškai nieko ypatingo Lietuvoje neatsitiko, tik žmonės iš Taivano salos norėjo save vadinti taivaniečiais“. (2022/01/17). <https://www.lvzs.lt/lt/lvzsnaujienos/giedrius-surplys-„o-juk-visiskai-nieko-ypatingo-lietuvoje-neatsitiko,-tik-zmones-iss-taivano-salos-norejo-save-vadinti-taivanieciais“>

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Žinių Radijas. “Dienos klausimas – Ar bandyti taikytis su Kinija?“ (2022/01/05)

<https://www.ziniuradijas.lt/laidos/dienos-klausimas/ar-bandyti-taikytis-su-kinija?video=1>

¹⁵⁸ LVŽS. Giedrius Surplys “O juk visiškai nieko ypatingo Lietuvoje neatsitiko, tik žmonės iš Taivano salos norėjo save vadinti taivaniečiais“. (2022/01/17). <https://www.lvzs.lt/lt/lvzsnaujienos/giedrius-surplys-„o-juk-visiskai-nieko-ypatingo-lietuvoje-neatsitiko,-tik-zmones-iss-taivano-salos-norejo-save-vadinti-taivanieciais“>

¹⁵⁹ Lrt.lt. “Kinijos atstovybėje apsilankęs Surplys: jeigu mes pakeistume tas kelias raideles, visas konfliktas su Pekinu baigtųsi“. (2022/02/11). <https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/lietuvoje/2/1613208/kinijos-atstovybeje-apsilankes-surplys-jeigu-mes-pakeistume-tas-kelias-raideles-visas-konfliktas-su-pekinu-baigtusi>

with China in which the countries proclaimed territorial integrity is ensured. Accordingly, G. Surplys claims that by this logic Lithuania is violating the principles that are acknowledged by bilateral agreements and eloquently describes the situation as an outrageous deed – “as going to my neighbour’s orchard, picking an apple and telling my neighbour that I have not done anything wrong”.¹⁶⁰ From the rhetoric of G. Surplys it could be understood that the politician is seriously concerned about Lithuania’s alleged infringement of treaties with China. In January of 2022, the Member of the Parliament initiated a parliamentary resolution calling for normalisation of Sino-Lithuanian relations in which explanation that Lithuania ultimately respects “One-China principle” was provided.¹⁶¹

4.14. *Valdemaras Valkiūnas*

Valdemaras Valkiūnas in his rhetoric discusses the Uyghur ethnic group problem in China and characterizes repressive China’s government’s campaign as a legitimate measure. The politician fiercely opposed to the initiated parliamentary resolution “On China’s Mass, Systematic and Gross Violations of Human Rights and Genocide against Uyghurs” motivated by the threat of Uyghur terrorists. Accordingly V. Valkiūnas justifies the policies executed by China in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region and explains that Uyghur terrorists are carrying out terrorist mass attacks in the public places which involve deaths of civilians and tourists.¹⁶² According to the politician, initiators of the resolution undermine the risks caused by Uyghur terrorists – V. Valkiūnas disclosed that these terrorist groups are also responsible for deaths of Europeans and Americans in the Syrian civil war. In the belief of the politician, such initiatives by the members of Parliament are subjective since they are influenced only by the partial information and are defined by V. Valkiūnas as an intervention with China’s interior matters.¹⁶³

¹⁶⁰ Žinių Radijas. “Dienos klausimas – Ar bandyti taikytis su Kinija?” (2022/01/05)

<https://www.ziniuradijas.lt/laidos/dienos-klausimas/ar-bandyti-taikytis-su-kinija?video=1>

¹⁶¹ LR Seimas. “Rezoliucija dėl vienos Kinijos politikos ir abipusė pagarba grįstų Lietuvos Respublikos ir Kinijos Liaudies Respublikos santykių“. (2022/01/10). <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAP/e652212071ee11ecb2fe9975f8a9e52e>

¹⁶² LR Seimas. II (Pavasario) sesijos rytinio posėdžio Nr.63 stenograma. (2021/05/20). <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAK/1201a720b9a611eb91e294a1358e77e9>

¹⁶³ Ibid.

4.15. *Other politicians*

Economic China-related topics were also discussed by other politicians who describe China as a vital partner for Lithuanian economy. For instance, Jonas Pinskus claims that failed economic cooperation with China will crumble the Lithuanian economy. The Member of the Regions faction in the Parliament argues that Lithuania economically, as a transit country, is connected with the East and the West. Therefore, J. Pinskus expresses the notion that we live in a global world and Lithuania cannot afford to cut economic relations with, as the politician mentions in one of his examples, China, in order for the interests of Lithuanian business and citizens to be ensured.¹⁶⁴ Similar rhetoric is conveyed in the comments of Mindaugas Puidokas. The politician also highlights the importance of China for the Lithuanian economy. In the opinion of the member of the Labour Party, Lithuania's conflicts with other countries, such as China, are demolishing the economy of the Baltic state.¹⁶⁵ M. Puidokas also uses frightening rhetoric and highlights that such foreign policy will be difficult to endure for Lithuanian society. According to the politician, because of the soaring prices, partially caused by disagreements with China, citizens are anxious and their mental health is harmed.¹⁶⁶

Interestingly, in Dainius Kepenis' rhetoric the questioning of The National Threat Assessment, in which China is identified as a threat to national security is evident. In a parliamentary discussion with the Director of the State Security Department Darius Jauniškis D. Kepenis made ironic comments about the aforementioned threat assessment. The politician declared that the individuals, whose activities have caused significant economic losses for Lithuania in its relations with China, could also be included into the annual security threat assessment.¹⁶⁷ It could be understood that D. Kepenis blames the current political leaders for the issues in Sino-Lithuanian relations.

¹⁶⁴ LR Seimas. III (Rudens) sesijos rytinio posėdžio Nr.130 stenograma. (2021/12/23). <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAK/096b0e90641311ecb2fe9975f8a9e52e>

¹⁶⁵ LR Seimas. III (Rudens) sesijos rytinio posėdžio Nr.132 stenograma. (2022/01/11). <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAK/344257b0732511ecb2fe9975f8a9e52e>

¹⁶⁶ LR Seimas. III (Rudens) sesijos rytinio posėdžio Nr.130 stenograma. (2021/12/23). <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAK/096b0e90641311ecb2fe9975f8a9e52e>

¹⁶⁷ LR Seimas. III (Rudens) sesijos rytinio posėdžio Nr.129 stenograma. (2021/12/21). <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAK/bc683950629c11ecb2fe9975f8a9e52e>

5. Analysis of the identified public figures

In this section, the rhetoric of selected public figures will be analysed. The public figures are understood as representatives of various organisations or companies, who have expressed their China-related views.

5.1. *Sigitas Besagirskas*

In the rhetoric of Sigitas Besagirskas comments of economic nature are most plentiful as the President of Vilnius Industry and Business Association discusses China-related topics through a lucrative partner frame. S. Besagirskas praises the Chinese private sector and its modernisation efforts. According to him, the Chinese companies are more European in their operating style and bigger corporations employ Westerners who help to deal with business matters. In the comments of S. Besagirskas China is illustrated as a market with which it is beneficial to cooperate since business-to-business relations are easy to maintain because of growing professionalism in the Chinese market.¹⁶⁸ Interestingly, in the judgement of S. Besagirskas, markets of Lithuania's other economic partners are inferior to the advantages offered by the Chinese. For instance, S. Besagirskas gives an example of business-to-business relations with Ukrainian partners – the President of Vilnius Industry and Business Association describes it as “a return to the 1990s since in terms of quality and mentality the underdevelopment is brutal, in comparison to China”.¹⁶⁹

Furthermore, in S. Besagirskas' rhetoric comments emphasizing the importance of China for the Lithuanian market are abundant and are exhibited in various characteristics. S. Besagirskas highlights China's major status in the global economy. According to him, 70% of the world's industries and 90% of medium and large enterprises are dependent on China; therefore, Lithuania as a market is too insignificant to ignore this feature.¹⁷⁰ S. Besagirskas argues that the consequences of losing China as an economic partner will certainly be devastating in long-term for the Lithuanian economy. China's withdrawal from Lithuanian market would mean the collapse of the local investment environment – companies will leave the Lithuanian market by relocating the local enterprises and the vacuum of investments may last even a decade that will lead to economic

¹⁶⁸ Alfa.lt. “Lietuvos ekonominiai santykiai su Kinija nutraukti, bet prekystaliai lūžta nuo kiniškų prekių: kaip tai įmanoma“. (2022/07/08). <https://www.alfa.lt/verslas/verslo-naujienos/lietuvos-ekonominiai-santykiai-su-kinija-nutraukti-bet-prekystaliai-luzta-nuo-kinisku-prekiu-kaip-tai-imanoma/259437/>

¹⁶⁹ Dovydas Petkus Youtube channel. “Sigitas Besagirskas. Kiek mums kainuos kova su Kinija?“. (2022/01/16). https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K_gQG8SEGbo

¹⁷⁰ Lrytas.lt. “S. Besagirskas: pasaulio ringe kaunasi trys sunkiasvoriai, o mes – tik paliegęs žiūrovas, kuris gavo į dantis“. (2022/01/07). <https://www.lrytas.lt/verslas/rinkos-pulsas/2022/01/07/news/s-besagirskas-pasaulio-ringe-kaunasi-trys-sunkiasvoriai-o-mes-tik-palieges-ziurovas-kuris-gavo-i-dantis-21951554>

stagnation since it will be too difficult and expensive to develop business since the economic ties with China would be cut.¹⁷¹ S. Besagirskas explains it through the aspect of the significance of imports from China which, in his opinion, could not be substituted. For instance, according to S. Besagirskas, the other alternatives in the global market do not exist or are inferior to the Chinese product by its cost and even quality that compromises the goods assembled or manufactured in Lithuania.¹⁷² Some specific industries now have to buy, for example, German production, which, as S. Besagirskas claims, is more expensive and, interestingly, usually not as reliable.

The importance of China's economic prowess in S. Besagirskas' rhetoric is also emphasized by evaluating Lithuania's attempts to diversify its economic partners in Asia. According to the President of Vilnius Industry and Business Association, the loss of China as an economic partner will not be sufficiently substituted with other markets. S. Besagirskas questions the long-term sustainability of alternative export markets such as South Korea, Australia or Singapore since he believes that an economic partnership with these countries will be unprofitable in comparison with China.¹⁷³ Also China's economic importance for Lithuania is framed through the criticism for aspirations to substitute the aforementioned country as a partner with Taiwan. As in the aforementioned example, S. Besagirskas questions the profitability and benefits of such cooperation by doubting the trade and economic cooperation with Taiwan "as not sufficient enough" since the possible investments that are discussed in the media are miniscule and the interest of Taiwanese investors is most probably low. S. Besagirskas also states that the marketed potential of Taiwan's famed semiconductor industry has no prospects in Lithuania since it is too expensive and sophisticated to make profits, as it is, in S. Besagirskas' opinion, evident through the example of the United States where such investments have not paid off.¹⁷⁴

Furthermore, in the rhetoric of S. Besagirskas comments indicating the search for the responsibility for the demise of Sino-Lithuanian relations are abundant. The President of Vilnius Industry and Business Association is critical of the Government's foreign policy towards China and accuses the current political leadership of causing unnecessary problems and instigating China. S. Besagirskas directly names current political leaders as responsible for such a situation and states

¹⁷¹ 15min.lt. "Santykiai su Kinija įkaitę iki raudonumo: kokį poveikį tai turės užsienio investicijoms?". (2021/12/23). <https://www.15min.lt/verslas/naujiena/bendroves/santykiai-su-kinija-ikaite-iki-raudonumo-koki-poveiki-tai-tures-uzsienio-investicijoms-663-1617430>

¹⁷² Vakarų ekspresas. "Dėl nesutarimų su Kinija veiklą stabdo pirmosios Lietuvos įmonės: valdžios sprendimus palygino su A. Lukašenkos veiksmais". (2022/01/12). <https://ve.lt/verslas/del-nesutarimu-su-kinija-veikla-stabdo-pirmosios-lietuvos-imonos-valdzios-sprendimus>

¹⁷³ Alfa.lt. "Lietuvos ekonominiai santykiai su Kinija nutraukti, bet prekystaliai lūžta nuo kiniškų prekių: kaip tai įmanoma". (2022/07/08). <https://www.alfa.lt/verslas/verslo-naujienos/lietuvos-ekonominiai-santykiai-su-kinija-nutraukti-bet-prekystaliai-luzta-nuo-kinisku-prekiu-kaip-tai-imanoma/259437/>

¹⁷⁴ Delfi.lt. "Iš esmės. Kuo baigsis Lietuvos, Kinijos ir Taivano "Meilės trikampis"?. (2022/01/05). https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NO7Cz_1bhkg

that such foreign policy decisions were unilateral and were not coordinated with business or other interest groups. In his rhetoric S. Besagirskas questions the executed China-related decisions, especially the authorisation of the opening of the Taiwanese Representative Office in Vilnius with such a title, and concludes that these were done without defining any specific political goals since, according to him, the only aim identifiable by assessing these decisions is “a provocation of China”.¹⁷⁵ Also S. Besagirskas is very critical of the Government’s declared foreign policy feature such as a “values-based foreign policy” which he ironically labels as “pseudo-values” and blames the current political leaders for applying it selectively. In his comments S. Besagirskas rhetorically asks about commitment to voice support for Taiwanese people when there are countless areas in the world where independence movements exist such as “Catalan or Basque nations”.¹⁷⁶ Accordingly, it is important to mention that S. Besagirskas did not voice any concerns about China’s responsibility in the demise of Sino-Lithuanian relations.

Also, interestingly, S. Besagirskas in his rhetoric discusses the support for Taiwan, articulated by some Lithuanian politicians. S. Besagirskas frames his views by projecting a message that Taiwan does not even need any Lithuanian support since Taiwan, in his opinion, does not have any independence goals. The President of Vilnius Industry and Business Association discredits Taiwan’s aspirations for wider international recognition by stating that Lithuania’s executed foreign policy does not provide any benefits for Taiwan. In the opinion of S. Besagirskas, there is no independence movement in the aforementioned island, and he explains that Taiwanese athletes compete in the Olympic Games not even under their own flag but under the Chinese Taipei Olympic flag.¹⁷⁷

5.2. Kęstutis Černeckas

In the rhetoric of Kęstutis Černeckas comments indicating China’s importance for the Lithuanian market are abundant. The Chairman of the Board of the Export Club at Vilnius Chamber of Commerce claims that the enhanced economic cooperation with Taiwan will not replicate the absence of economic cooperation with China. K. Černeckas argues that Taiwan as a market is not promising at all for Lithuanian producers and entrepreneurs. According to him, historically trade figures between Taiwan and Lithuania are low and trends of the past years indicate statistical regression. Furthermore, K. Černeckas argues that the exports of the European Union are also

¹⁷⁵ Dovydas Petkus Youtube channel. “Sigitas Besagirskas. Kiek mums kainuos kova su Kinija?“. (2022/01/16). https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K_gQG8SEGbo

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ TV3.lt. “Sigitas Besagirskas apie Lietuvos ir Kinijos konfliktą: Net pats Taivanas Kinijos olimpiadoje eina su Taipėjaus vėliava“. (2022/02/11). <https://www.tv3.lt/naujiena/video/sigitas-besagirskas-apie-lietuvos-ir-kinijos-konflikta-net-pats-taivanas-kinijos-olimpiadoje-eina-su-taipejaus-veliava-n1138648>

displaying a trend of regression. Therefore the expectations of Lithuanian politicians to successfully substitute China with Taiwan are unreasonable.¹⁷⁸ Also K. Černeckas is not convinced about the prospects of Taiwanese investments into the semiconductor industry in Lithuania and indicates that such an investment would not be profitable for the receiving country. In his opinion, it is questionable if such an industry could function in Lithuania since the majority of materials for production originate in China, furthermore, a heavily robotized semiconductor factory would not require a lot of manpower. Therefore, the benefit of creating workplaces is also ambiguous.¹⁷⁹

In the rhetoric of K. Černeckas the comments indicating the search for the responsibility for the demise of Sino-Lithuanian relations are also noticeable. K. Černeckas directly names the current Government as responsible for tensions between Vilnius and Beijing and condemns political leaders for being, in his words, incompetent and “involving the country into the conflict with China”.¹⁸⁰ Moreover, K. Černeckas criticises the current political leaders for refusing to recognise the executed foreign policy as a mistake and blames for projecting misleading information about the consequences of such policy. According to him, the main contributors to executed policy, such as the Minister of Economy and Innovation, Aušrinė Armonaitė, and Member of Parliament, Matas Maldeikis, display statements diminishing China’s economic importance for Lithuanian market and amplifying Taiwan’s economic prowess.¹⁸¹ It is important to mention that no statements indicating China’s blame for the failure of Sino-Lithuanian relations were found.

¹⁷⁸ Lrytas.lt. “Verslininkai: JAV ir ES didina prekybines apimtis su Kinija, o mes kasmet iš prekybos negauname daugiau kaip 2 mlrd. Eurų“. (2022/07/22). <https://www.lrytas.lt/verslas/rinkos-pulsas/2022/07/22/news/verslininkai-jav-ir-es-didina-prekybines-apimtis-su-kinija-o-mes-kasmet-is-prekybos-negauname-virs-2-mlrd-euru-24033259>

¹⁷⁹ Delfi.lt. “Kinijos žaidimai su Lietuvos verslu: įspėja, kad pasekmes pajus ir gyventojai“. (2021/12/19). <https://www.delfi.lt/verslas/verslas/kinijos-zaidimai-su-lietuvos-verslu-ispeja-kad-pasekmes-pajus-ir-gyventojai.d?id=88991905>

¹⁸⁰ Vakarų Ekspresas. “Lietuvos ekonomika lekia į prarają: po konflikto su Kinija milijoniniai nuostoliai“. (2022/01/06). <https://ve.lt/verslas/lietuvos-ekonomika-lekia-i-praraja-po-konflikto-su-kinija-milijoniniai-nuostoliai>

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

5.3. *Marijus Velička*

Marijus Velička's statements indicate that he characterizes Lithuania as an unprecedented case in geopolitics. The former Vice-Minister of National Defence explains that other countries did not execute such policies that could jeopardize their relations with China. According to him, different countries recognize China's role in the global economy – such countries as France, Germany, Italy or the United Kingdom make huge discounts to enter the Chinese market or even to have access to the Chinese goods.¹⁸² M. Velička also claims that other countries did not even adopt such rhetoric towards that China that was adopted by Lithuania.

Also M. Velička is critical of the current Government regarding its foreign policy towards China. Specifically, the former Vice-Minister of National Defence questions the Government's declared "values-based" foreign policy and claims that it is applied selectively. M. Velička argues that Lithuanian political leaders are picking on China and do not raise similar concerns about, for instance, Vietnam, in which human rights are also allegedly violated. According to him, Vietnam is not "a lesser evil" and the European Union has released a *joint communiqué* about the violation of human rights there.¹⁸³

5.4. *Kristijonas Vizbaras*

In the rhetoric of Kristijonas Vizbaras comments highlighting China's unparalleled economic importance to Lithuania are detected. The co-founder of Brolis Group emphasizes that China is an irreplaceable partner considering its status in the worldwide economy since it is dominating in the global supply chains. In the opinion of K. Vizbaras, China is *de facto* a second major power in the world and it trades with all the countries in the world – according to the entrepreneur there are no markets that could even fill the gap of China. K. Vizbaras questions how "Taiwan, a country of 20 million people could replace the major power and world's factory - China".¹⁸⁴ Also, according to the co-founder of Brolis Group, the effects of cutting economic ties with China will be disastrous for the Lithuanian economy. Since Lithuania will lose access to such

¹⁸² NeRedaguota Youtube channel. "Marijus Velička. Kinija". (2022/02/05) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JIE-KYIHdZE>

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Info TV. "Info komentarai su Arnu Mazėčiu". 210 laida. (2022/01/11). <https://lnk.lt/info-komentarai-su-arnu-mazeciu/152167>

an important market, that will affect the local investment environment and, as K. Vizbaras explains, from the perspective of the global supply chains Lithuania will become a “third world country”.¹⁸⁵

Also in the rhetoric of K. Vizbaras it is noticeable that Lithuania is described as an unprecedented case regarding its relations with China. The entrepreneur emphasizes the fact that China is the main economic partner of many countries of the world. K. Vizbaras explains that while Lithuania made political decisions that led to the demise of bilateral relations, other states of the European Union are not evaluating such options and continue cooperating with China.¹⁸⁶ Furthermore, the co-founder of Brolis Group argues that various controversies about the violations of human rights in China are not an issue for global corporations and even countries to continue business activities. K. Vizbaras questions Lithuania’s foreign policy while, for example, such countries as Germany are expanding economic cooperation with Beijing and the world’s largest and most advanced manufacturers, such as Tesla, are unveiling new factories in, as K. Vizbaras describes it, “the Uyghur region”.¹⁸⁷

Furthermore, in K. Vizbaras rhetoric comments, indicating the search of responsibility for worsened bilateral relations between Lithuania and China are also detectable. The entrepreneur is critical of current Lithuanian political leadership and claims that the executed foreign policy caused tensions in Sino-Lithuanian relations and blames the Government for “creating a situation that has no solution”.¹⁸⁸ Also, the co-founder of Brolis Group in his rhetoric is displaying frustration with local political leaders for their stance regarding the aforementioned circumstances. K. Vizbaras claims that the Government chose to sacrifice the bilateral relations with China in order to preserve its “values-based” foreign policy.¹⁸⁹ In the rhetoric of K. Vizbaras no comments were found that would indicate China’s responsibility for the demise of relations between Lithuania and China.

¹⁸⁵ Delfi.lt. “Iš esmės. Kiek žalos gali padaryti Kinijos kerštas ir ar mus gins Europa?” (2022/01/18). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EZEEd7yPUIEY>

¹⁸⁶ Delfi.lt. “Verslo požiūris. Vizbaras: produkto negalime eksportuoti ne tik į Kiniją, bet ir Vokietiją, Belgiją, kitas šalis“ (2022/01/14). <https://www.delfi.lt/verslo-pozioris/diskusijos/vizbaras-produkto-negalime-eksportuoti-ne-tik-i-kinija-bet-ir-vokietija-belgija-kitas-salis.d?id=89178271>

¹⁸⁷ Info TV. “Info komentarai su Arnu Mazėčiu“. 210 laida. (2022/01/11). <https://lnk.lt/info-komentarai-su-arnu-mazeciu/152167>

¹⁸⁸ Delfi.lt. “Verslo požiūris. Vizbaras: produkto negalime eksportuoti ne tik į Kiniją, bet ir Vokietiją, Belgiją, kitas šalis“ (2022/01/14). <https://www.delfi.lt/verslo-pozioris/diskusijos/vizbaras-produkto-negalime-eksportuoti-ne-tik-i-kinija-bet-ir-vokietija-belgija-kitas-salis.d?id=89178271>

¹⁸⁹ Lrt.lt. “Kristijonas Vizbaras apie situaciją su Kinija: mes buvome paaukoti dėl vertybinės politikos”. (2022/01/19). <https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/verslas/4/1592377/kristijonas-vizbaras-apie-situacija-su-kinija-mes-buvome-paaukoti-del-vertybines-politikos>

6. Results of an inductive frame analysis

As it was discussed in the literature review chapter, the topic of Chinese soft power is not thoroughly researched. Therefore, no defined or operationalised frames, which could be utilised in assessing the rhetoric of Lithuanian politicians and public figures, were found. Therefore, this part of the research presents the author's input to the identification of frames. The identified frames were determined from the core arguments found in the analysed rhetoric of the politicians and public figures. The chosen study is a valuable contribution to the research field of Chinese soft power phenomenon in Lithuania.

6.1. *Lucrative partner frame*

The lucrative partner frame in the rhetoric of analysed politicians and public figures is defined through the projection of idea that China is a state that is beneficial to cooperate with since the partnership will certainly be beneficial. The lucrative partner frame is revealed differently in the analysed data.

Firstly, the lucrative partner frame is expressed through the recognition of the bilateral relationship between Lithuania and China as fruitful. Such notion is exclusive to the former or current high rank officials who have described the partnership as “*mutually beneficial*”. For example, the former prime ministers, S. Skvernelis and A. Butkevičius praised the cooperation with China, in their respective tenures, and described it as productive and significantly contributing to the prosperity of Lithuania. The incumbent President of Lithuania, G. Nausėda in the past also described the cooperation as such and even expressed an aspiration of extensive cooperation despite the currently alleged Chinese retaliation measures against Lithuania.

Furthermore, the lucrative partner frame is indicated through the interpretation that China is indeed a lucrative partner and provides advantageous economic benefits in other countries. For instance, R. Karbauskis explained that China helped to increase load volumes in ports of Latvia and enhanced business development there, while G. Surplys provided success stories of Ireland and Slovakia as model examples of partnership with China. A. Skardžius also emphasized China's involvement in infrastructural projects of Croatia and Poland.

The discussed frame is also indicative from the business perspective. S. Besagirskas highlighted the advantages of China's private sector and described it as more advantageous than other potential markets.

The revelations of lucrative partner frame do resemble or even reiterate the main values of China's economic soft power approach, since the analysed individuals highlight such notions as mutual benefit or shared benefits which are usually advertised as the main values of China's economic toolkit.

6.2. Irreplaceable partner frame

The irreplaceable partner frame was identified in the rhetoric of the majority of analysed politicians and public figures. The aforementioned frame is indicative of an idea that the deterioration of cooperation between Lithuania and China will cause severe consequences for the Lithuanian economy as well as the notion that China's economic importance is not replicable. Such belief is manifested diversely in the rhetoric of analysed politicians and public figures.

Firstly, the irreplaceable partner frame in the rhetoric of analysed politicians and public figures is expressed through the variety of descriptions of China's major status in the global economy. Therefore, Beijing's influence cannot be replicated and it is too substantial to be overlooked. For instance, J. Pinsky maintained that Lithuania as a transit country cannot ignore China. A. Mazuronis emphasized China's position in global supply chains, while S. Besagirskas and K. Vizbaras highlighted the world's dependency on China's economic might. Similarly, S. Jakeliūnas estimated that the prospects of economic cooperation with China are incomparable to other potential partners.

Secondly, the irreplaceable partner frame emerges through an assumption that China is an integral part of Lithuania's economic prosperity and demise of bilateral relations will be fatal since absence of China will leave an unfulfilled vacuum in economy of the Baltic country. Multiple individuals insist that the state budget will lose vital income, what will lead to economic stagnation. For example, such politicians as S. Skvernelis, R. Karbauskis, A. Mazuronis and M. Puidokas explain that such consequences would be hurtful for Lithuanian population since it will certainly cut the public wealth. The implications for business environment are also debated. S. Skvernelis, R. Karbauskis, G. Surplys, S. Besagirskas and K. Vizbaras discuss that local enterprises will certainly relocate or close down considering difficulties of maintaining relations with Chinese partners.

Furthermore, it is exhibited through considerations that the Government's intentions to replace China with Taiwanese market will not be fruitful. The analysis revealed different characteristics of explanations for such discussions. Some analysed politicians and public figures assert that such claims are irrational. For instance, G. Paluckas described it as an "illusion" while R. Karbauskis believed that Taiwan's potential to replicate the impact of China for Lithuanian

economy is a “fairy tale”. The co-founder of Brolis Group, K. Vizbaras, explains such claims through the comparison of Chinese and Taiwanese populations, while S. Besagirskas labels Taiwan as “unprofitable” partner. Interestingly, K. Černeckas indicates the recent trend of shrinking trade figures between Taiwan and the European Union as well as Taiwan and Lithuania. Also, the former, along with S. Besagirskas, question the profitability of Taiwan’s investments into semiconductor industry in Lithuania.

The revelations of lucrative partner frame do resemble or even reiterate the main values of China’s economic soft power approach, since the analysed individuals highlight such notions as mutual benefit or shared benefits which are usually advertised as the main values of China’s economic toolkit.

The exhibition of irreplaceable partner frame does resemble China’s soft power through its economic aspect. It could be understood that China’s economic toolkit is acknowledged as so valuable that it could be even impossible to substitute.

6.3. Lithuania is at fault frame

The Lithuania is at fault frame is projected as an idea that exclusively the current Lithuanian political leadership is at fault for the demise of Sino-Lithuanian relations while refraining from the comments indicating China’s responsibility for such circumstances. The aforementioned frame is most frequently identified in the rhetoric of analysed politicians and public figures and is expressed in various ways.

Mainly, the Lithuania is at fault frame is interpreted through the notion that the current political leaders are executing a foreign policy that is provocative towards China. The majority of the analysed individuals branded Lithuania’s China-related decisions as an enforcement of a “confrontational” policy. For instance, S. Skvernelis declared that Vilnius “chose” the conflict with Beijing, while G. Paluckas and P. Gražulis labelled the conflict as “declaration of war”. Also, R. Karbauskis, G. Nausėda directly named the current leadership as accountable by asserting that the implemented policies are contradicting to country’s historic foreign policy path towards China.

Furthermore, the discussed frame is expressed through the arguments that the current political leadership is applying its “values-based” foreign policy selectively. Therefore, the frame is manifested through the practice of “whataboutism” and the notion that Lithuanian political leadership chose to enforce it exclusively on China. To give an example, G. Paluckas and M. Velička questioned why Lithuania is highlighting China’s human rights controversies whilst

ignoring the cases of Singapore and Vietnam or as S. Besagirskas debated Lithuania's choice to support Taiwan while ignoring the independent movements of Basque and Catalan nations. Also, S. Jakeliūnas criticized the Minister of Foreign Affairs for discussing potential cooperation with the United Arab Emirates, which statistically are not more "democratic" than China.

Finally, the Lithuania is at fault frame is manifested by the accusations that the current political leadership is projecting misleading information as a refusal to admit its foreign policy mistakes. To give an example, R. Karbauskis and G. Surplys suspected that the political leaders are lying by stating that the authorisation of the Taiwanese Representative Office with such title is not the only cause of China's retaliation measures and that the resolution of this case would not make China to discontinue such measures, while G. Paluckas claimed that contrary to the popular belief, China did not attack Lithuania. Meanwhile, K. Černeckas insisted that the projected motivations of current foreign policy are false.

The expressions of Lithuania is at fault frame resemble China's use of discourse power. The message, that China has no responsibility for the demise of relations with Lithuania, is conveyed through the rhetoric of analysed politicians and public figures.

6.4. Unprecedented policy frame

The unprecedented policy frame is projected through explanations that Lithuania's revision of its relations with China is a standout case in the world since other countries are cherishing their relations with Beijing.

The unprecedented policy frame is most frequently discussed through the notion that other countries are behaving towards China differently than Lithuania. For instance, R. Karbauskis and A. Mazuronis explained that even Lithuania's allies are strengthening their relations with China. Whereas G. Paluckas and A. Butkevičius illustrated that other political actors, even such as the United States or the European Union, recognise China's global status and avoid the risk of endangering their relations with Beijing. On top of that K. Vizbaras explained that some countries even ignore allegations of human rights abuses in China whilst M. Velička debated that other countries are even doing discounts to enter the Chinese market. S. Skvernelis explained that the practices of other countries regarding relations with China should be acknowledged.

Furthermore, the discussed frame is abundant through the controversy of the Taiwanese Representative Office in Vilnius. G. Paluckas, R. Karbauskis, G. Surplys, A. Mazuronis stated that no other country authorised an opening of representative office with such a title.

The described frame resembles China's discourse power by which it counters the framing of various topics. In this case Lithuania's review of its bilateral relations with China is diminished by highlighting the contrast of such policy.

6.5. Sovereignty frame

The sovereignty frame is apparent as reiteration of China's major interests such as "One-China principle" or the question of Taiwan's international recognition.

The sovereignty frame was mainly discussed through the controversy of the Taiwanese Representative Office in Vilnius. S. Skvernelis, G. Paluckas, R. Karbauskis and G. Surplys stated that Lithuania did interfere with the "One-China principle" by authorising the opening of the forenamed office with such title. Additionally, G. Paluckas claimed that Lithuania did not respect globally accepted principles, while R. Karbauskis explained that Lithuania could have breached the framework of its agreements with China.

Interestingly, the sovereignty frame is also expressed through other interpretations of Taiwan's international recognition, such as S. Skvernelis' decline of expressing support for Taiwan's World Health Organisation admission bid or V. Pranckietis' prohibition of organising the Taiwan-related discussion in the Lithuanian Parliament.

The sovereignty frame does resemble the use of China's discourse power as well by which China is countering narratives that project ambiguity towards China's comprehension of its sovereignty.

6.6. Peaceful partner frame

In the rhetoric of the analysed politicians and public figures the peaceful partner frame is noticeable through explanations that China is a harmonious partner. In the rhetoric of S. Skvernelis and P. Gražulis the peaceful partner frame is manifested as an exaggeration of state security risks posed by China, whilst V. Pranckietis declared that China should not be perceived as a direct threat, and is a responsible power that cares for the interests of its partner country and does not interfere with local matters.

Interestingly, partial exhibitions of the peaceful partner frame, in which the propositions that China should be described differently than it is characterised by some high level officials, were found in the analysis. G. Paluckas defined China as the country, which should not be treated as an "axis of evil" but should be always involved into "multi-layered" structure of the

world, while A. Skardžius expressed a sentiment that China should not be defined as a totalitarian state.

The manifestations of peaceful partner frame do resemble China's soft power features. Such explanations are similar to China's positioning of its external relations as "historically peaceful".

6.7. Support for Taiwan is excessive frame

The support for Taiwan is excessive frame is interpreted through explanations that Lithuania's support for Taiwan is disproportionate and meaningless. Mainly this frame is interpreted through the expressed ambiguity of Taiwan's independence aspirations. For example, A. Mazuronis and S. Besagirskas have stated that Lithuania's support is pointless since Taiwan does not retain serious ambitions of statehood, whilst the latter commented that Taiwan does not even participate in the Olympics under its own flag. Also, the discussed frame is apparent in the rhetoric of R. Karbauskis through the notion that such Lithuanian support could be an instigator of a major conflict between China and Taiwan.

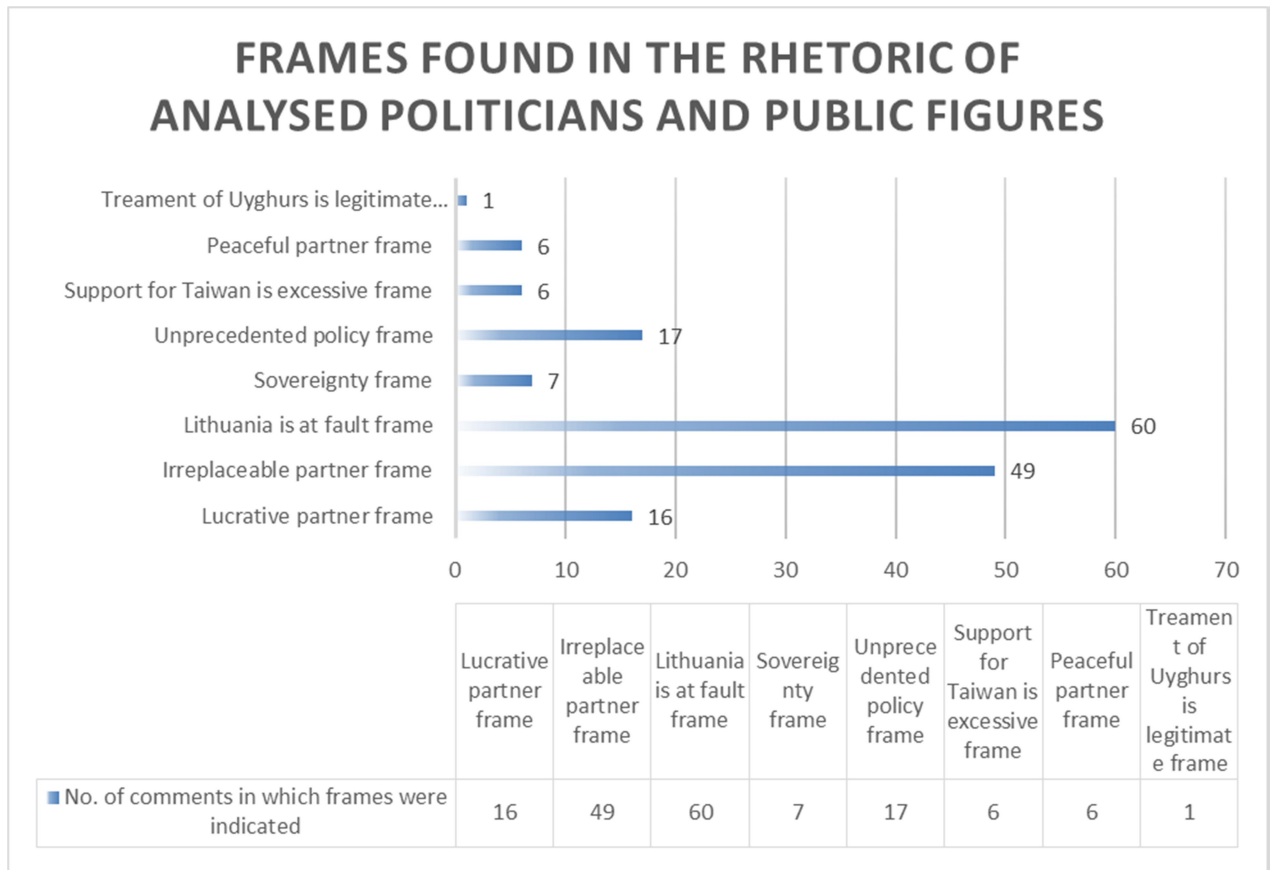
The support for Taiwan is excessive frame by its nature is very similar to sovereignty frame. It does resemble the use of China's discourse power as well by which China is countering narratives that project ambiguity towards China's comprehension of its sovereignty, but in this situation it is done through diminishing Taiwan's aspiration of wider international recognition.

6.8. The treatment of Uyghurs is legitimate frame

The treatment of Uyghurs is legitimate frame is defined through the legitimisation of China's current policy in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. The identified frame is exclusive to the rhetoric of the Member of the Parliament, V. Valkiūnas, who justified the reportedly repressive policies executed against ethnic minorities in the aforementioned region. The frame is expressed through the notion that Uyghurs are responsible for violent terrorist attacks in China as well as for deaths of Europeans and Americans in the Syrian civil war. Therefore, China has to deal with such a problem. Such frame also by its nature resembles the use of China's discourse power to counter the unfavourable narratives of human rights violations in the Xinjiang region.

6.9. General observations

To achieve the goal of the research 100 sources of data were analysed by qualitative inductive method. The analysed data included various articles, opinion pieces, social media posts, television or radio shows in which China-related questions were discussed. The research revealed few tendencies on how China-related comments are discussed in the rhetoric of analysed individuals.



1 table: compiled by the author on the basis of the performed analysis.

First of all, it is evident that the most reoccurring topics are of China's irreplaceability as well as the search of responsibility for the demise of Sino-Lithuanian relations. Mostly, the analysed individuals express discontentment towards the current political leadership. 60 examples of *Lithuania is at fault frame* were found, which discuss the implementations of various policies that, in the opinion of investigated individuals, led to decline of relations with China. The examined politicians and public figures also generally claimed that the consequences of the deterioration of bilateral relations with Beijing will be harsh since 49 examples of *irreplaceable partner frame* were found. Such topics that Lithuania is a standout case in the world, regarding its policy towards China, and notions of China as lucrative partner are less notable in the analysed data. 17 examples

of an *unprecedented policy frame* were found, in which tendency to point out the fact that other countries are treating its relations with Beijing differently. The descriptions of China as a partner, which is beneficial to cooperate with, is exhibited through a *lucrative partner frame*, which was found in 16 examples. Other frames that are indicated in the research emerged sporadically. The tendency to reiterate China's sovereignty interests through *sovereignty frame* was illustrated in 7 examples. In 6 examples of *peaceful partner frame* the tendency of describing China as a responsible and harmonious partner emerged. Furthermore, regarding the *support for Taiwan is excessive frame* 6 examples of it were found, which highlighted the tendency of interpreting Lithuania's support for Taiwan as disproportionate. Finally, the *treatment of Uyghurs is legitimate frame* also emerged in the analysed data. The only example is exclusive to V. Valkiūnas who identified the Uyghurs as terrorists. Such trends indicate that China-related topics between analysed individuals mainly were discussed through the form of criticism for the current political leadership. Also, it could be suggested that the deterioration of Sino-Lithuanian relations instigated discussions about the possible economic consequences since Beijing's economic importance was also widely debated between investigated individuals.

The research also revealed certain tendencies related to the identified groups of politicians and public figures analysed in this research. It was found that politicians as well as public figures framed China-related topics similarly since the frames, which were indicated in the research, are distributed in the rhetoric of both politicians and public figures. However, certain distinctions were recognised. It was found that the comments of economic origin were expressed differently between the distinguished groups. For instance, in general, the analysed politicians discussed China's importance for the Lithuanian economy and possible consequences for it in abstract and more emotional language, while the identified public figures provided particular figures and precise examples on why the demise of Sino-Lithuanian relations is a significant issue for the Lithuanian economy. Also, it was found that the *lucrative partner frame* is more distinct in the rhetoric of politicians, whilst the *sovereignty* and *peaceful partner frames* are exclusive to the rhetoric of aforementioned group. Such trends suggest that the group of politicians discussed China-related topics in a larger spectrum of topics than public figures that were analysed in the research.

Furthermore, the research also revealed the tendency that frames, found in the analysis, were more noticeable in certain periods of time. Timeline around the date of opening of The Taiwanese Representative Office in Lithuania is identified as the point from which the examples of frames were found much more frequently than earlier. Therefore, it could be argued that this key event determined a wider debate on China-related topics in Lithuania.

Conclusions

This research addressed the question of what are the Chinese soft power frames in the rhetoric of Lithuanian politicians and public figures and how are they expressed. This was important to investigate because of the ambiguous opinion in Lithuanian society towards questions related to China. It could be argued that Chinese soft power projection in Lithuania has failed since the public perception of China has significantly decreased. However, the majority of Lithuanian society has a negative opinion towards Lithuania's foreign policy on China. Thus, in order to answer the aforementioned question, this master's thesis aimed to investigate what is communicated by local politicians and what China-related messages are carried in their rhetoric. Consequently, a goal to identify the Chinese soft power frames in the assessments and opinions of Lithuanian politicians and public figures and to analyse how they are expressed was set. To achieve such a goal, a qualitative inductive content analysis was performed. The Chinese soft power concept, based on soft power theory, and also the framing theory were applied. This theoretical approach was useful in the context of the study because it provided an opportunity to identify the Chinese soft power aspects and also established a framework for perceiving meanings in the analysed data.

The research revealed that the majority of frames found in the rhetoric of analysed politicians and public figures resemble a discursive element of Chinese soft power. In general, the discussed frames are characterised as countering narratives that portray China negatively or promoting China's position on its sensitive topics. It was found that such depiction is revealed variously in the analysed data. Foremost, frames questioning Lithuania's review of its relations with China were found, which, in addition, were most abundant. Such a notion was by far the most commonly projected through the *Lithuania is at fault frame*. This frame was expressed in the rhetoric of the investigated individuals as objections to the current political leaders for the executed foreign policy towards China, while refraining from discussion about China's responsibility for the demise of Sino-Lithuanian relations. Also, the questioning of review of relations with China is conveyed through the *unprecedented policy frame* which manifested as a notion that other countries, even Lithuania's allies, are executing their respective foreign policies towards China differently. Furthermore, a group of frames which counter or promote certain narratives on topics that are sensitive to China were also found. The research revealed that the *sovereignty frame* and the support for Taiwan is excessive frame were occasionally illustrated in the analysed data. The former was portrayed as reiteration of Beijing's perception of its sovereignty, while the latter was characterised as ambiguity of Taiwan's independence aspirations. Similarly the *treatment of Uyghurs is legitimate frame* countered the unfavourable narrative of human rights violations in

China and was illustrated as a justification of China's policy in the province of Xinjiang, although only one example of it was found. Additionally, a discursive element of Chinese soft power is evident through China's positioning as a harmonious partner. Such depiction was specified through the *peaceful partner frame* which conveyed the message that China should not be perceived as threatening.

Furthermore, it was found that a major portion of examples, in which frames were indicated, resembled an economic element of Chinese soft power. The economic resource is considered as the strongest feature of Chinese soft power, hence it is not surprising that frames of economic nature were abundant in the analysed data. Two frames of such type were indicated – the *irreplaceable partner frame* and the *lucrative partner frame*. Albeit these frames are similar by its nature but they are different by the conveyed meaning. Indications of the *irreplaceable partner frame* were recurrent in the rhetoric of analysed politicians and public figures. This frame was expressed variously – mainly it was voiced through a perception that demise in cooperation between Lithuania and China will cause harsh consequences for the economy of the Baltic state, although examples of highlighting China's economic importance for Lithuania as not replicable were also detected. Meanwhile, the *lucrative partner frame* was projected as recognition of the partnership between Lithuania and China as beneficial or illustration of China as a provider of economic benefits in other countries or even as an advantageous market.

Surprisingly, the research revealed that no frames, which indicate the resemblance of such Chinese soft power resources as the aid efforts or the cultural toolkit, were found in the rhetoric of analysed politicians and public figures. The review of the relevant literature suggest that China was indeed active in assisting Lithuania to battle COVID-19 pandemic by supplying the Baltic state with aid packages, it was also evident that China projected its cultural soft power through the Confucius Institute of Vilnius University. Nonetheless, no frames that depicted China as a responsible and action-driven major power or emphasized attraction to China's culture were found. However, it is important to mention that V. P. Andriukaitis displayed an appreciation for Chinese measures in combating COVID-19, but such comments appeared in the earliest stage of the pandemic when there was an information vacuum in the medical community.

It is important to mention that this research has potential limitations. The selection of the analysed politicians and public figures, which was predicated on expression of favourable views towards China in their rhetoric, is subject to the author's biases since the process was based on his personal judgement. Similarly, the qualitative inductive content analysis approach that was adopted for data analysis is also subject to the author's decisions since it required a certain amount of assumptions and is based on personal interpretation of the data. Furthermore, the problem of the

research is rooted in the struggle to understand what influences the ambiguous opinion in Lithuanian society towards China-related questions; however, the analysis only partially explored what could possibly impact general beliefs. It would be relevant to continue the research on Chinese soft power in Lithuania by exploring Beijing's official positions in Lithuanian information space. Moreover, it would be meaningful to research the rhetoric of Lithuanian politicians and public figures in which the foreign policy of Lithuania is justified in order to identify the counter-frames and assess how these are conveyed.

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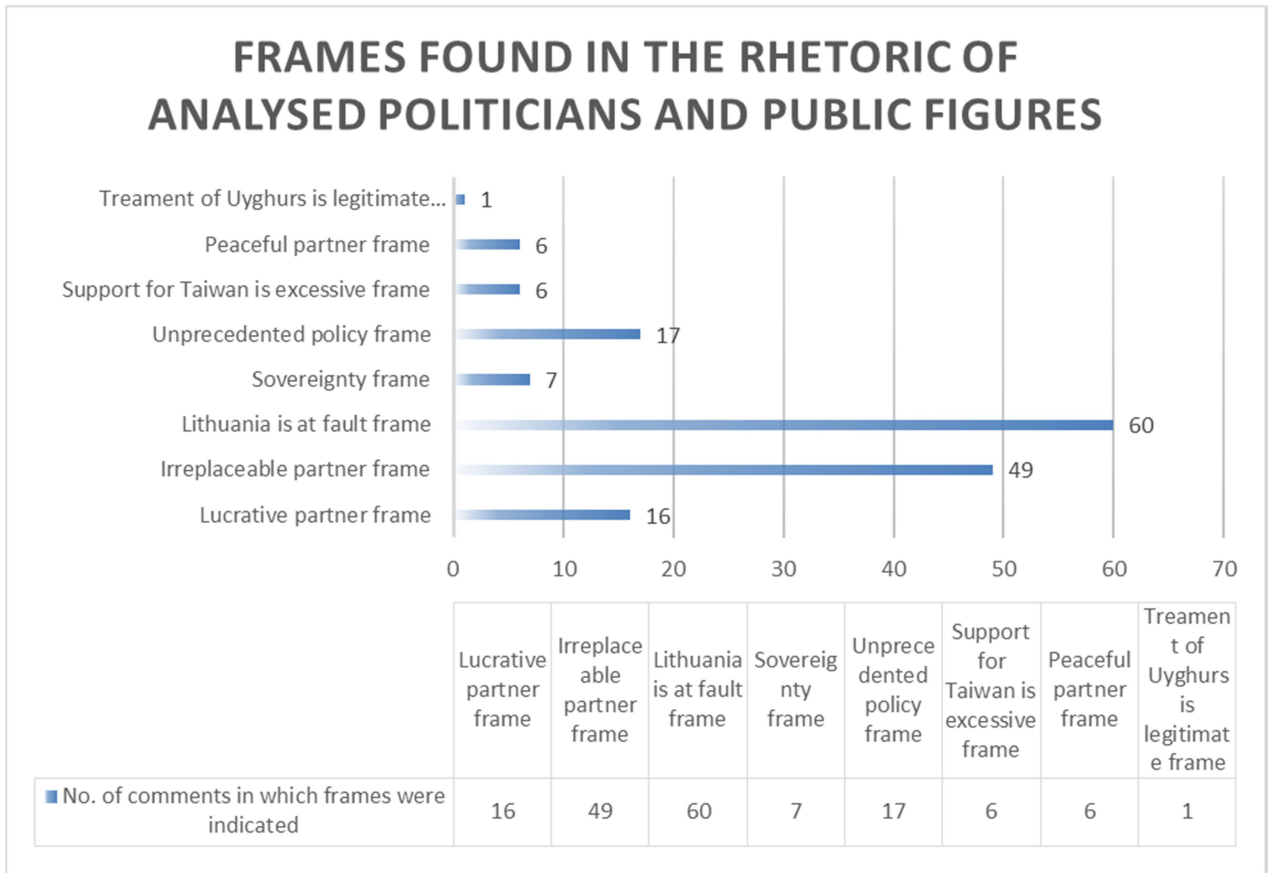
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Annex

Table No. 1.



Summary

The main problem of this research is rooted in the struggle to understand what influences the ambiguous opinion in Lithuanian society towards questions related to China. The selected approach of analysis of the rhetoric coming from Lithuanian politicians and public figures provides a unique perspective of exploring what could, to a certain extent, be influencing Lithuanian society.

The main question of this master's thesis – what are the Chinese soft power frames in the rhetoric of Lithuanian politicians and public figures, and how are they expressed? In order to achieve the described goal the author aimed to identify the politicians and public figures, who have expressed Chinese soft power aspects in their rhetoric and to investigate the rhetoric of the identified individuals based on qualitative inductive content analysis. The established theoretical framework of this research was the Chinese soft power concept, based on Nye's soft power theory, as well as the framing theory.

The research revealed that the majority of frames found in the rhetoric of analysed politicians and public figures resemble a discursive element of Chinese soft power. It was found that such depiction is revealed variously in the analysed data. Foremost, frames questioning Lithuania's review of its relations with China were found, which, in addition, were most abundant. This notion was by far most commonly projected through the Lithuania is at fault frame, which was expressed as objections to the current political leadership for the executed foreign policy against China. However, examples of such notion were conveyed through the unprecedented policy frame as well, which manifested as a notion that other countries are executing their respective foreign policies towards China differently. The discursive element of Chinese soft power was also resembled by a group of frames which countered or promoted certain narratives on topics that are sensitive to China. For instance, the sovereignty frame was portrayed as reiteration of Beijing's perception of its sovereignty, while the support for Taiwan is excessive frame was characterised as ambiguity of Taiwan's independence aspirations. Also, one example of the treatment of Uyghurs is legitimate frame was found, which countered the narrative of human rights violations in China. Additionally, a discursive element of Chinese soft power is evident through China's positioning as a harmonious partner, which was described by the peaceful partner frame.

Furthermore, it was also found that the frames of economic origin, that resembled an economic element of Chinese soft power, were also abundant. Two frames of such type were indicated – the irreplaceable partner frame and the lucrative partner frame. The former was voiced

through a perception that demise in cooperation between Lithuania and China will cause harsh consequences for the economy of the Baltic state, although examples of highlighting China's economic importance for Lithuania as not replicable were also detected, while the latter was projected as recognition of the partnership between Lithuania and China as beneficial or illustration of China as a provider of economic benefits in other countries.

Finally, the research also revealed that no frames, which indicate the resemblance of such Chinese soft power resources as the aid efforts or the cultural toolkit, were found in the rhetoric of analysed politicians and public figures.

Recommendations: it would be relevant to continue the research on Chinese soft power in Lithuania by exploring Beijing's official positions in Lithuanian information space. Moreover, it would be meaningful to research the rhetoric of Lithuanian politicians and public figures in which the foreign policy of Lithuania is justified in order to identify the counter-frames and assess how these are conveyed.

Santrauka

Pagrindinė šio tyrimo problema - siekis suprasti, kas daro įtaką nevienareikšmiškai Lietuvos visuomenės nuomonei su Kinija susijusiais klausimais. Pasirinktas Lietuvos politikų ir visuomenės veikėjų retorikos analizės metodas suteikia unikalią perspektyvą tyrinėti, kas tam tikru mastu galėtų daryti įtaką Lietuvos visuomenei.

Pagrindinis šio magistro darbo klausimas - kokie yra Kinijos minkštosios galios rėmai Lietuvos politikų ir visuomenės veikėjų retorikoje ir kaip jie išreiškiami? Siekiant aprašyto tikslo, autorius identifikavo politikus ir visuomenės veikėjus, kurie savo retorikoje išreiškė Kinijos minkštosios galios aspektus, ir kokybinės indukcinės turinio analizės pagrindu siekė iširti identifikuotų asmenų retoriką. Pasirinktas teorinis šio tyrimo pagrindas buvo Kinijos minkštosios galios koncepcija, paremta Nye minkštosios galios teorija, taip pat rėmimo teorija.

Tyrimas atskleidė, kad dauguma analizuotų politikų ir visuomenės veikėjų retorikoje aptinkamų rėmų yra panašūs į Kinijos minkštosios galios diskurso elementus. Nustatyta, kad toks vaizdavimas analizuotuose duomenyse atsiskleidžia įvairiai. Pirmiausia rasta rėmų, kvestionuojančių Lietuvos santykių su Kinija peržiūrą, kurie, be to, buvo gausiausi. Ši samprata bene dažniausiai buvo projektuojama per Lietuvos kaltės rėmus, kurie buvo išreiškiami kaip priekaištai dabartinei politinei vadovybei dėl vykdomos užsienio politikos Kinijos atžvilgiu. Tačiau tokios sampratos pavyzdžių buvo perteikta ir per precedento neturinčios politikos rėmus, kurie pasireiškė kaip samprata, jog kitos šalys savo užsienio politiką Kinijos atžvilgiu vykdo kitaip. Kinijos minkštosios galios diskurso elementą taip pat priminė grupė rėmų, kurie priešino arba, kaip tik, skatino tam tikrus naratyvus jautriomis Kinijai temomis. Pavyzdžiui, suvereniteto rėmas buvo vaizduojamas kaip Pekino suverenumo suvokimo pakartojimas, o rėmas "Parama Taivanui yra pernelyg didelė" apibūdinamas kaip Taivano nepriklausomybės siekio kvestionavimas. Taip pat buvo rastas vienas „elgesys su uigūrais yra legitimus“ rėmo pavyzdys, kuris prieštaravo eskaluojamam naratyvui apie žmogaus teisių pažeidimus Kinijoje. Be to, Kinijos minkštosios galios diskurso elementas pastebimas ir per Kinijos kaip harmoningos partnerės pozicionavimą, kuris buvo apibūdinamas taikaus partnerio rėmu.

Be to, nustatyta, kad ekonominės kilmės rėmų, kurie priminė ekonominę Kinijos minkštosios galios elementą, taip pat buvo gausu. Buvo išskirti du tokio tipo rėmai - nepakeičiamo partnerio rėmas ir naudingo partnerio rėmas. Pirmasis buvo išsakomas per suvokimą, jog Lietuvos ir Kinijos bendradarbiavimo žlugimas sukels skaudžių pasekmių Baltijos valstybės ekonomikai, nors aptikta ir pavyzdžių, pabrėžiančių Kinijos ekonominę svarbą Lietuvai kaip nepakartojamą, o

antrasis buvo projektuojamas kaip Lietuvos ir Kinijos bendradarbiavimo pripažinimas kaip naudingo arba iliustruojantis Kiniją kaip ekonominės naudos teikėją kitose šalyse.

Galiausiai tyrimas taip pat atskleidė, kad analizuotų politikų ir visuomenės veikėjų retorikoje neaptikta rėmų, kurie indikuotų tokius Kinijos minkštosios galios išteklius, kaip humanitarinės pagalbos teikimas ar kultūrinis įrankis.

Rekomendacijos: būtų aktualu tęsti Kinijos minkštosios galios Lietuvoje tyrimus, tiriant oficialias Pekino pozicijas Lietuvos informacinėje erdvėje. Be to, būtų prasminga tirti Lietuvos politikų ir visuomenės veikėjų retoriką, kurioje pagrindžiama Lietuvos užsienio politika, siekiant identifikuoti priešingus rėmus (counter-frames) ir įvertinti, kaip tokia politika perteikiama.