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The Situation of the Tibetan and Uyghur Communities in Switzerland: Actual and Perceived Exertions of Pressure

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Non-official English translation

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Abstract

The situation of the Tibetan and Uyghur diaspora communities has received considerable global public attention for years. Parliaments, non-governmental organizations, legal courts and academia have investigated the extent and the nature of the transnational repression that these specific exile communities are said to experience. The governments of several European countries acknowledge the subject matter in essence. For some time, intelligence services have emphasized in their annual reports that the Tibetan and Uyghur exile communities feel the "self-assertive and demanding behavior"¹ of the People's Republic of China (PRC), particularly in the context of the resolute fight against the so-called "five poisons," which in the view of the Chinese Party-State endanger "the internal unity of the State and its territorial integrity."² In 2022, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights of the United Nations published a report, in which evidence of forced repatriation and general patterns of intimidation and threats are qualified as "credible"³ and the PRC is asked to stop all intimidations of and reprisals against Uyghurs abroad.

The topic is also of concern to the Swiss public and the Swiss government. There is a societal and political need to ascertain evidence on the occurrence of repression, attempts at pressuring and intimidations of members of the Tibetan and Uyghur exile communities in Switzerland. Given that the activities pertinent to this subject matter often occur covertly, it is a complex and challenging affair to register the actual levels of the phenomenon in Switzerland. Researchers in this area can easily themselves become the addressees of exertions of pressure. Those participating and assisting in interviews, as well as the data collected, have to be protected with considerable effort. Serious concerns on the part of the interviewed persons and considerations of research ethics additionally complicate the establishment of factual knowledge. Moreover, the scope of the possibly relevant subject area is immense and would require sustained and comprehensive research efforts.

It is against this background that the present research report attempts to provide an evidential basis for the situation of the Tibetan and Uyghur communities in Switzerland. Recommendations do not form part of the

mandate. Rather, the report's central aim is to provide an overview of relevant events between the turn of the millennium until today that affect the enjoyment of fundamental rights, be they initiated by Chinese or other actors in Switzerland. Besides encroachments connected to fundamental rights, the systematic exertion of pressure on Tibetans and Uyghurs whether actually occurring, only attempted or simply perceived is of interest. The process, the modalities and the ascertainable extent of supposed infringements of fundamental rights and attempts at pressuring are equally significant. In addition to actors that can possibly be attributed to the PRC and to which the bulk of this research report is devoted, particular attention is also given – even if much briefer – to the Swiss Confederation and its administrative bodies and to the Tibetan Government-in-Exile. The studied addressees are broadly conceptualized as members of the Tibetan and Uyghur communities, including persons who are not read as ethnically Uyghur or Tibetan, but who engage with the community to a sufficient degree in order to become the target of reprisals. In addition to individuals, organizations with a "connection to the topic of Tibetans and Uyghurs"⁴ are also studied. Lower priority was given to possible pressuring of institutions of higher education and of the Swiss authorities themselves.

In order to cover a maximally broad spectrum of relevant events and to maximize the explanatory power of the findings, an approach taken from qualitative social science research was adopted for the part dealing with the exertions of pressure by the PRC. This approach involved three phases: in a first phase, nine expert interviews were conducted and a database of around 200 globally reported cases was established, from which hypotheses on processes concerning potential infringements of fundamental rights and attempts at repression in Switzerland were deduced. In a second phase, these hypotheses were tested through 46 interviews with members of the Tibetan and Uyghur communities in Switzerland. In a third phase, additional forms of evidence were included to increase the reliability of the data gathered through interviews and to identify the exertions of pressure actually occurring in Switzerland. This triangulation was completed through an institutional analysis of the Chinese Party-State,⁵ by means of which the methods

and addressees of the identified processes could be potentially linked with the initiators of the repression. The discussion of potential exertion of pressure by the Swiss Confederation and its administrative bodies and by the Tibetan Government-in-Exile was methodologically not based on hypotheses, but on the interviews conducted, an analysis of media reports and direct inquiries with the relevant political actors. Accordingly, the focus in these parts of the report is set on documenting the perceived exertions of pressure on the part of the interviewees.

This research report shows that members of the Tibetan and Uyghur communities in Switzerland are monitored, threatened, co-opted and in some cases put under pressure to return to or enter Chinese territory. Refugee espionage occurs on Swiss territory. With regard to members of the Tibetan community, softer cases of physical violence, for instance, at political demonstrations executed by members of official Chinese representations, were registered. Also, the issuing of official documents (e.g. visas for travel to Tibet) was identified as an effective means of exerting pressure.

In relation to actions by the Swiss authorities, members of the Tibetan community in particular, have the impression that their freedom to protest peacefully in locations important to their cause (e.g. near the Chinese Embassy in Bern or in front of the Federal Palace) has increasingly been restricted. They also describe what they perceive as a more restricted handling of political asylum in Switzerland as a form of repression. These factors, combined with an at least subjectively perceived change Federal Government's priorities in favor of economic relations with the PRC, lead to a weakening of the sense of security of the members of these communities in Switzerland.

Some actions by the Tibetan Government in Exile and the association *Tibetan Community in Switzerland & Liechtenstein* are also perceived as repressive by some members of the Tibetan community, even if only by single individuals and groups. The unusual situation of exile, in which the Tibetan diaspora finds itself, brings

with it challenges that might be responsible in parts for this perceived pressure.

Furthermore, the report identifies cross-cutting issues that are relevant throughout the findings established by way of the various tested hypotheses. These include exertions of pressure that do not occur in Switzerland, but target family members in Tibet or Xinjiang (also known as East-Turkestan)⁶; the widely shared impression that one's own Tibetan and Uyghur communities are infiltrated by spies, their confidants and snitches; fault lines alongside political persuasions on the status of Tibet or Xinjiang, which pervade the Tibetan and Uyghur communities; and a climate of fear, which can be detected in many parts of the concerned communities.

Finally, a cumulative-diachronic view reveals a considerable effect of the perceived infringements on fundamental rights among members of the Tibetan and Uyghur communities in Switzerland, which is reflected in various areas of life (family relations, communication, traveling, mobility, residence rights, protection from persecution, physical and psychological integrity, data protection, cyberspace, political rights, etc.).

Table of Contents

Abstract	i
List of Abbreviations	iv
1. Background and Mandate	1
2. Methodology	2
2.1 Researching Potential Exertions of Pressure by the PRC	3
2.2 Researching Potential Exertions of Pressure by Other Actors	5
2.3 Technical Infrastructure, Security Measures and Personal Data	5
3. Theoretical Approach	7
3.1 Research Literature on Transnational Repression	7
3.2 Taxonomy of Theoretically Conceivable Forms of Exertions of Pressure and Hypotheses	8
A. Refugee Espionage	8
B. Co-Optation	9
C. Issuing of Official Documents	9
D. Forced Repatriation	9
E. Pressure through Messaging	10
F. Observation and Photography	10
G. Surveillance of Communication	10
H. Cyber Attacks	11
I. Physical Violence	11
J. Abuse of International Lists	11
3.3 Addressees: The Tibetan and Uyghur Communities in Switzerland	12
4. Research Findings	13
4.1 Initiator Analysis for the PRC	13
4.2 Exertions of Pressure by the PRC against the Tibetan and Uyghur Communities	14
A. Refugee Espionage	14
B. Co-Optation	16
C. Issuing of Official Documents	17
D. Repatriation between Pressure and Force	19
E. Pressure through Messaging	20
F. Observation and Photography	21
G. Surveillance of Communication	23
H. Cyber Attacks	24
I. Soft Forms of Physical Violence	25
J. Abuse of International Lists	25
4.3 Perceived Pressure by Actions of the Swiss Authorities	26
4.4 Perceived Pressure by Actions of the Tibetan Government in Exile and the TCSL	28
4.5 Exertions of Pressure by the PRC on Swiss Institutions of Higher Education and Swiss Authorities	29
A. Swiss Institutions of Higher Education	29
B. Swiss Authorities	30
4.6 Cross-Cutting Issues	30
A. Family in Tibet and Xinjiang as a Means of Pressure	31
B. Gray Areas of Espionage/Surveillance (Snitching)	31
C. Fault Lines within the Exile Communities	32
D. Climate of Fear	33
5. Conclusions	35
References and Annotations	37

List of Abbreviations

Art./Arts.	Article/Articles
BGE	Bundesgerichtsentscheid/Decision of the Federal Supreme Court
CAPDTC	China Association for Preservation & Development of Tibetan Culture
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CD	Corps Diplomatique
cf.	compare
CTRC	China Tibetology Research Center
Dodis	Diplomatische Dokumente der Schweiz/Diplomatic Documents of Switzerland
E.	Erwägung/paragraph
Ed./eds.	Editor/editors
e.g.	exempli gratia/for example
etc.	et cetera/and so on
f./ff.	following
FDFA	Federal Department of Foreign Affairs
FIS	Federal Intelligence Service
Fn.	footnote
FOJ	Federal Office of Justice
GfbV	Gesellschaft für bedrohte Völker/Society for Threatened Peoples
GSTF	Gesellschaft Schweizerisch-Tibetische Freundschaft/Swiss-Tibetan Friendship Association
i.e.	id est/that is
MPS	Ministry for Public Security of the PRC
MSS	Ministry for State Security of the PRC
NGO	Non-governmental organization
OCAO	Overseas Chinese Affairs Office
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
p.	page
PRC	People's Republic of China
PSB	Public Security Bureaus
SEM	State Secretariat for Migration
SOAS	School of Oriental and African Studies University of London
SSSB	Shanghai State Security Bureau
TCSL	Tibetan Community in Switzerland & Liechtenstein
TYAE	Tibetan Youth Association in Europe
UFWD	United Front Work Department
UN/UNO	United Nations Organization
US/USA	United States of America
WUC	World Uyghur Congress

1. Background and Mandate

This research report on the situation of the Tibetan and Uyghur communities in Switzerland provides a basis for answering Postulate 20.4333 of the Swiss Foreign Policy Committee of the National Council, in connection with the Badertscher Interpellation 21.3423. The "question of the exercise of fundamental rights" is at the center of this report. The authors have been asked with establishing the "necessary evidential basis" to answer the Postulate and to provide "an overview of relevant events that is as comprehensive as possible." Besides encroachments connected to fundamental rights, the systematic exertion of pressure on Tibetans and Uyghurs that actually occurs, is attempted or just perceived as such is of interest, be it initiated by Chinese or other actors in Switzerland. The processes, modalities, and the ascertainable extent of supposed infringements of fundamental rights and attempts at pressuring are equally significant. Recommendations are not part of the mandate.

In line with the mandate, the report distinguishes between addressees, methods and initiators of the repression. Amongst the possible (1) *addressees of repression*, the focus is on individuals and organizations with a "connection to the topic of Tibetans and Uyghurs."⁷ The group of individuals entails members of the Tibetan and Uyghur communities as well as exposed activists, irrespective of whether they are perceived as ethnically Uyghur or Tibetan. Connected to that is the question of whether specific grounds are necessary for an attempted or actual repression, or whether belonging to the diaspora is a sufficient criterion per se. At the level of organizations, the Tibetan and Uyghur diaspora communities in Switzerland are of particular importance, but civil society organizations can also be addressees of repression. Lower priority is given to Swiss authorities as well as institutions of higher education in Switzerland in the report.(2) The *methods of repression* include phenomena which go beyond a "usually accepted level of interference with one's freedom of action," whereby repetitions or combinations of seemingly "harmless" events can amount to a sufficient level of interference.⁸ The scope and channels of such processes are highlighted in this report primarily from the perspective of those affected.

In this respect, the focus is not only on the question of whether fundamental rights are being infringed, but also on what forms such infringements can take, which activities can trigger repression or infringements of fundamental rights, whether a system can be identified on the part of the perpetrators of the pressure, and how successful and effective the attempts at repression actually are. A deterring or intimidating effect is equally important. For the diaspora communities, there is also the specific question of possible infiltration and, more generally, of surveillance, control and influence. (3) As for the *initiators of repression*, the report focuses on whether acts of non-state actors can be attributed to official bodies and on connections, i.e. the networks involved.

In the following, against the background of the mandate and the distinctions made, the chosen methodological approach for different actors under investigation and the precautions taken with regard to technical infrastructure, security measures and the handling of personal data are explained (Chapter 2). This is followed by an explication of the theoretical approach (Chapter 3), derived from the research literature on transnational repression as well as hypotheses generated on the basis of a taxonomy of theoretically conceivable forms of pressure, as well as a short overview of the history and structure of the communities in question. The following main part of the report (Chapter 4) presents the research findings on the observable forms of repression by the PRC and the perceived forms of pressure through the actions of the Swiss authorities and the Tibetan Government-in-Exile, and addresses cross-cutting issues. The report ends with a short conclusion (Chapter 5).

2. Methodology

The methods of exerting pressure in the framework of transnational repression are highly dependent on the institutional foundations and strategic orientations of its initiators. At the same time, it can be assumed that these methods are deliberately geared towards specific groups of addressees, who themselves react to the respective attempts at repression in different ways. Moreover, the initiators of such repression usually operate in secrecy, therefore making processes in question non-transparent. It is almost impossible to collect meaningful data in large quantities. Potential infringements of fundamental rights and attempts at pressuring Tibetan and Uyghur communities in Switzerland can thus scarcely be examined with statistical surveys. This research report therefore analyzes the phenomena in question as interconnected processes that lead towards an overarching problematization in the form of cross-cutting issues and in-depth studies (see section 4.6).

The study requires different approaches with regard to potential repression by the PRC (see section 2.1) in addition to perceived repression by other actors (see section 2.2) and the subordinately examined repression within Swiss educational institutions and public authorities (see section 2.1). The primary goal of the examination of potential pressure exerted by PRC actors is to map causal relationships within these processes on the basis of hypotheses: "Actor X uses method Y to exert pressure on Z." To account for the broadest possible spectrum of processes and to maximize the significance of the results, this report adopts a methodological approach informed by qualitative social research. To record potential exertions of pressure by the Swiss Confederation and its authorities, by the Tibetan Government-in-Exile, and by the PRC on Swiss educational institutions and authorities, this report does not pursue a triangulation of different forms of evidence. Rather, it works on the basis of interviews, media analyses, and direct consultations with relevant political actors.

Between June 2022 and February 2023, the research team conducted a total of 57 interviews. The duration of the interviews ranged from 20 minutes to five hours (resulting in a total of 84.5 hours of transcribed

audio material). The interviews were conducted in German, English, and French. In a few cases, Tibetan- and Turkish-speaking interpreters were consulted. In addition to conversations with experts, a total of 18 members of the Uyghur and 28 members of the Tibetan communities were interviewed in the French- and German-speaking parts of Switzerland. This group of interviewees also included individuals who do not themselves belong to the Uyghur or Tibetan ethnic groups, but are actively engaged in the respective communities. The names of the interviewed individuals from the Tibetan and Uyghur communities cannot be made public due to security concerns. They were guaranteed anonymity, and considerable efforts have been made to uphold the security of the persons involved in the research process as well as their data privacy (see sub-chapter 2.3). Furthermore, a total of 5 letters were sent to the "mailbox" that the research team had set up specifically for this purpose. Finally, two people from the Han Chinese diaspora in Switzerland were interviewed, who were expected to provide insights into the activities of the Party-State in Switzerland.

Interviews were conducted with the following experts from universities: 1. Prof. Fiona Adamson (political scientist, SOAS London) on the state of research on transnational repression, 2. Prof. Robert Barnett (Tibetologist, SOAS and King's College London) on instigation analysis, 3. Prof. Wolfgang Behr (Sinologist, University of Zurich) on the situation in Switzerland, 4. Palmo Brunner, MA (political scientist and doctoral student, University of Zurich) on her pertinent research, 5. Prof. Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz (Religious Studies scholar and Tibetologist, University of Bern) on Tibet-specific questions and the situation in Switzerland, 6. Dr. Dilyara Müller-Suleymanova (anthropologist with focus on diaspora studies, Zurich University of Applied Sciences) on ethnological questions related to Uyghurs in Switzerland, 7. Prof. Nicolas Zufferey (Sinologist, University of Geneva) on the situation in Switzerland; and from civil society: 8. Fabienne Krebs (Society for Threatened Peoples, Campaign Coordinator Business & Human Rights) on the situation in Switzerland, 9. Angela Mattli (Public Eye, formerly Society for Threatened Peoples) on the

Society for Threatened Peoples sponsored Postulate 18.2020 and the respective 2018 report, all of which formed the basis for Postulate 20.4333.¹⁰ Additional formal inquiries with the Conference of Swiss Public Prosecutors and the Conference of Cantonal Police Commanders of Switzerland produced no significant results.

2.1 Researching Potential Exertions of Pressure by the PRC

The methodological approach to researching possible repression by the PRC against the Tibetan and Uyghur communities in Switzerland involved three phases: in the first phase, a database of attempts at pressuring and encroachments against Tibetans and Uyghurs was put together on the basis of existing research and reported cases from around the world. From this database, a taxonomy of forms of repression was constructed and corresponding hypotheses on the range of possible infringements of fundamental rights and attempts at pressuring in Switzerland were deduced. In the second phase, these hypotheses were tested through interviews about events and processes in Switzerland. In the third phase, additional sources of evidence on encroachments against members of the Tibetan and Uyghur communities in Switzerland were included to increase the reliability of the data gathered through the interviews. This triangulation was completed through an initiator analysis of the Chinese Party-State. By comparing 1) known areas of responsibility of individual specific institutions of the Chinese Party-State with 2) methods of the processes described and with 3) some of the concrete evidence from the interviews with the addressees, it was possible to establish the instigators of the pressure exerted with a high degree of probability on the part of the PRC, its official representations (embassies, consulates) and actors associated with it. Overall, this reveals the forms of pressure and repression exerted on members of the Tibetan and Uyghur communities in Switzerland by actors who can be attributed to the PRC.

Phase I: Global Range of Cases and Formation of Hypotheses

The formation of hypotheses on the channels of influence and the mechanisms of exertions of pressure was conducted based on a cataloguing and a comparative analysis of globally reported cases – with the exception of Switzerland. Methodologically, it is irrelevant whether these reports are consistently and in all respects truthful. The purpose of collecting and mapping the range of cases was to enable a maximally comprehensive identification of theoretically conceivable forms of cases that could possibly occur in Switzerland and to construct a taxonomical framework for use in the planned interviews. The data was mainly based on reports by the media, non-governmental organizations and think tanks and, in some cases, on academic research findings on attempts to exert pressure and attacks against members of the Tibetan and Uyghur communities. The hypotheses were then categorized and organized along aspects of their relevance to fundamental rights.

Phase II: Interviews with Potential Addressees and "Letter Box"

In Phase II, the hypotheses were tested for their plausibility in Switzerland in interviews with potential addressees of repression attempts. Particular attention was given to the selection process for the interviews with members of the Tibetan and Uyghur communities in Switzerland. Unlike randomized methods that aim at representative samples of the demographic groups being studied along variables such as age, gender and regional distribution, the present report had to select persons who could share insights with the research team on the processes of exertions of pressure based on their networks, actions and experiences.¹¹ In order to find out whether there are individual reasons for attempted or actual pressure or whether belonging to the diaspora in general is a decisive criterion, it was also necessary to ensure that not only active representatives of pertinent organizations or other leading figures of the communities in question were interviewed, but also persons who are not exposed and not known in the public eye.

Given a potential feeling of insecurity in the two communities regarding the topic of repression, it was essential to build trust with the interviewees in order to arrange for personal interviews and to gain possibly sensitive information.

To meet these requirements, the persons to be interviewed were selected along a snowball sampling procedure.¹² In a first step, informal conversations were held with members of the Tibetan and Uyghur communities to identify persons who do not occupy active political roles in the respective community associations, but who still were named as important nodal points, i.e. well-connected individuals within the corresponding communities. These first nodal points were then questioned in semi-structured interviews based on a question catalog developed in the first phase on processual hypotheses. In a next step, the respondents were asked about who in their network could be possibly affected by such processes ("Are there persons in your network who are involved in such processes and could know more about this topic?") and requested to help establish contact (snowball sampling). In this way, further persons to be interviewed could be identified and a first basis of trust established. The question catalog was adapted iteratively through the interview with each additional person and the understanding of processes and modalities of repression improved. The interview phase was concluded once saturation of information about the processes underlying the hypotheses was reached, i.e. once the descriptions of the nature, modalities and intensity of attempted or actually occurring repression were increasingly becoming repetitive and no new insights were being gained. Thereafter, in order to register the relevant addressees and the magnitude of concrete cases of repression in Switzerland as comprehensively as possible, active members of the most important community associations (see chapter 4) were contacted and interviewed if they had not already been liaised through the snowball sampling procedure. In addition, a "letter box" was set up, by way of which

members of the Tibetan and Uyghur communities could send in letters, either anonymously or with real names, and share with the research team cases of attempted or actually occurring repression known to them. The information about this option to make oneself known via this "letter box" was widely spread in five languages (Tibetan, Uyghur, German, French, English) throughout the various Tibetan and Uyghur associations in Switzerland. The purpose of the "letter box" was to reach more persons than would have been possible through the direct instrument of interviews alone. The option of anonymous letters was also intended to address any security concerns related to a physical meeting.

Phase III: Reliability Test

In the context of the present research report, the findings of the interviews with members of the Tibetan and Uyghur communities in Switzerland were tested for their reliability. To this end, the results from the interviews were compared to publicly available materials or documentation that was made available to the research team (e.g. correspondences, screenshots, photos, audio and video materials, databases from Swiss authorities). The resulting insights from this triangulation on attempted and actually occurring repression against members of the Swiss Tibetan and Uyghur communities were also held against the initiator analysis conducted.¹⁴ This further increased the credibility of the statements made in the interviews.

Swiss Institutions of Higher Education and Authorities

With regard to the potential exertion of pressure by the PRC on Swiss institutions of higher education and Swiss authorities in connection with Tibetan and Uyghur issues, which was researched at a lower level, besides interviews and reports, requests were also sent to institutional actors themselves. As regards the educational institutions, a formal request was sent to swissuniversities and the rectorates assembled there. Selected international offices of Swiss universities were

also approached informally via emails, which led to altogether five conversations with employees of these units. Moreover, three interviews were conducted with lecturers and professors who teach and/or research on the PRC, Tibet or Xinjiang at Swiss universities. Concerning the authorities, the Swiss Association of Cities and the Association of Swiss Communes were contacted. The request was forwarded to the cities of Basel, Bern, Geneva, Lausanne and Zurich, out of which the latter three cities responded. Overall, the responsiveness of institutions of higher education and of authorities was moderate. The research report can show only limited results in this area.

2.2 Researching Potential Exertions of Pressure by Other Actors

In addition to the repression by actors possibly attributable to the PRC, to which the major part of this research report is devoted, attention is also given to the Swiss authorities and its administrative bodies as well as the Tibetan Government-in-Exile. Their actions can also be perceived by members of the Tibetan and Uyghur communities as restricting their fundamental rights and freedoms. However, this does not necessarily involve actions that intend to restrict the exercise of fundamental rights or to repress, but actions that may be subjectively perceived by members of the affected communities as being repressive. In this part of the report, the chosen methodology did not rely on hypotheses, but on interviews, media reports, official documents and in single cases on direct communication with the respective authorities. Newly available sources on Swiss Tibet policy in the most recent volumes of DODIS – Diplomatic Documents of Switzerland were examined and media searches in French and German conducted on Factiva (Dow Jones) and Swissdix. Regarding the actions of the Tibetan Government-in-Exile and the Tibetan Community in Switzerland & Liechtenstein (TCSL), existing research literature was consulted.

2.3 Technical Infrastructure, Security Measures and Personal Data

The potentially very sensitive information captured in this research report required an elaborate security concept. Background discussions and clarifications with various experts were held to ensure the best possible procedures in relation to data security, the protection of interviewees and the research team. After consulting with the responsible unit in the Federal Intelligence Service and subsequent cooperation with the IT Services of the University of Basel, a security concept was formulated that addressed general security risks in the context of the topic of the research report, as well as the concrete security of the interviewees. The security concept and the general handling of data (sourcing, editing, storing) was approved by the University of Basel's Ethics Committee, with involvement of the Data Protection Officer, in a decision of 11 July 2022.

The interviewed persons from within the Swiss Tibetan and Uyghur communities were instructed about potential risks and explicitly orally agreed to participate in the research. To minimize possible security risks for the involved persons, meetings were arranged via split and, whenever possible, end-to-end encrypted communication, while meetings took place at publicly-accessible institutions (universities, colleges, rented meeting rooms). The mobile phones of all those present were locked away securely. Interviews were recorded with the expressed consent of the interviewees and by a recording device with no function to connect to the internet. All persons who agreed to assist in this research were instructed on the security procedures and bound to secrecy over all information made available to them in the context of this research report.

The requirements for this report demanded the research and analysis of concrete events. As a result, the witness statements of specific individuals had to be included in the research report. The Federal Office of Justice, however, publishes no personal data, neither about the victims of transnational repression,

nor about the instigators. As a result, not only did the details of the people directly interviewed in the context of this research report have to be fully anonymized, but also no other personal data was allowed to be processed and published in the research report. Accordingly, the sources and references for the database as per Phase I and for the reliability test as per Phase III of the research report can only be published to a very limited degree. The respective sources are on file with the authors of the research report.

3. Theoretical Approach

3.1 Research Literature on Transnational Repression

The contexts relevant to this research report are discussed in the political science research literature under the keywords of transnational repression and diaspora policy. The topic has gained increasing attention in recent years.¹⁵ Securitization theory offers an additional frame of explanation for extraterritorial diaspora politics.¹⁶ The overarching interest of this field of research is to find out how, when and why governments take repressive action against their own citizens, but sometimes also against citizens of other states outside their own national borders.¹⁷ The aim of transnational repression is first and foremost to make criticism, disloyalty or even political opposition against the regime in the home country more difficult, or to prevent it. With regard to the PRC, in addition to the fact that transnational repression against the Uyghur exile community has increased rapidly in recent years, it is also noted that the addressees of these forms of repression tend to be targeted because of their ethnic belonging and not primarily because of their political activism.¹⁸

Transnational repression is studied in connection with legitimation, co-optation and cooperation with non-state actors as a form of state-led transnational strategies of authoritarian regimes. The literature in the field shows how authoritarian "diaspora-strategies" are tailored selectively to different segments of the diaspora communities and their respective roles. For example, some groups are repressed and disadvantaged, whereas others are rather managed, supervised and controlled.¹⁹ According to Adamson (expert interview), different strategies can be applied depending on the target state. In states where intelligence-based transnational repression comes into conflict with the national sovereignty of the target state, loyal elites among the diaspora groups can come to the fore as agents of compliance.²⁰ Here the literature highlights how authoritarian regimes make use of loyalists to monitor, harass and threaten the diaspora community informally and via home-state institutions abroad.²¹

With regard to the different strategies of repression the research literature distinguishes between surveillance, threats, forced disappearance, forced repatriation and lethal retribution.²² Furstenberg, Lemon and Heathershaw have further developed these characteristics through a three-stage escalation model, according to which members of exile communities are "warned" in a first phase through arrest warrants, defamation, surveillance and threats, then, among other things, "imprisoned" through arrest in the country of refuge and travel bans to the country of origin, and in the "end game" are forcibly repatriated and murdered.²³ In his book on the question of how authoritarian regimes make use of global tactics of persuasion and of repression, Alexander Dukalskis distinguished between journalists, activists, opposition politicians, former government officials and citizens as targets of repression and codes different forms of repression along the phenomena of personal threat, imprisonment, physical violence, extradition, abduction and assassination. For the PRC, he lists a total of 167 cases.²⁴

This literature also gives particular importance to the use of coercion against third parties in order to exert pressure on the actual target persons, for example in the form of "injury and incarceration, threats and harassment, forced participation in regime propaganda and defamation, deprivation of resources and travel bans" against family members.²⁵ Furthermore, the academic discourse on the topic emphasizes that, in addition to repressive strategies, authoritarian regimes also aim to politically exclude exile communities by preventing individuals abroad from participating in political processes at home. This interrupts or even destroys ties to the home country.²⁶

Furthermore, recent literature on transnational repression has paid great attention to new technologies and global media, which have enabled new types of interaction with and within the diaspora in the course of globalization.²⁷ It is shown that authoritarian regimes are increasingly resorting to surveillance- and malware-attacks to expand the reach of their repression strategies. This also allows for subliminal and thus difficult-to-detect interferences with the sovereignty of the host states harboring the diaspora communities.²⁸

3.2 Taxonomy of Theoretically Conceivable Forms of Exertions of Pressure and Hypotheses

From the past two decades, numerous media reports, specialized reports by non-governmental organizations²⁹ and a few research papers from around the world are available on transnational repression against Tibetans and Uyghurs. In addition, there are isolated court rulings in which abuses against Tibetans and Uyghurs have been legally established.³⁰ As part of this research report the cases recorded in these sources were collected and systematically analyzed. From this, the following taxonomy of forms of repression recorded worldwide, which are theoretically also conceivable in Switzerland, can be derived (see the corresponding structure in section 4.2):

Targeted Person / Form of Repression	Ethnic Tibetans and Uyghurs	Exposed Persons in Tibetan and Uyghur Communities (e.g. members of associations, participants in protests)	Prominently Exposed Persons in Tibetan and Uyghur Communities (e.g. board members of relevant associations, representatives of exile governments, politically prominent or particularly active advocates)
A.	Refugee Espionage	-	-
B.	-	Co-Optation	Co-Optation
C.	Issuing of Official Documents as an Instrument of Pressure	Issuing of Official Documents as an Instrument of Pressure	Issuing of Official Documents as an Instrument of Pressure
D.	Forced Repatriation	Forced Repatriation	Forced Repatriation
E.	Pressure through Messaging	Pressure through Messaging	Pressure through Messaging
F.	-	Observation and Photography	Observation and Photography
G.	-	Surveillance of Communication	Surveillance of Communication
H.	-	Cyber Attacks	Cyber Attacks
I.	-	Physical Violence	Physical Violence
J.	-	-	Abuse of International Lists

The taxonomy first lists forms of pressure for which simply belonging to the diaspora generally seems to suffice as a decisive criterion, and then moves on to forms of pressure for which individual reasons may be increasingly important. Against the background of this taxonomy, the following hypotheses can be formulated:

A. Refugee Espionage

Hypothesis: "Actors attributable to the PRC pressure members of the Tibetan and Uyghur communities with insecure residential status into spying on their own diaspora communities in Switzerland."

There are many reports from across the world according to which PRC actors regularly exert pressure on Tibetan and Uyghur refugees in order to induce them into spying on their own diaspora communities in their host countries or carrying out other services.³¹ Persons seeking asylum, rejected asylum seekers, or persons whose residential status is insecure for other reasons seem particularly at risk to become addressees of such pressure, as financial hardship and a precarious life situation facilitate exertions of pressure and recruiting efforts.³² These often appear to be members of the Tibetan and Uyghur communities who participate in the communities, but

who do not occupy a central position in them.

According to the global reports analyzed, recruitment can take place in the target country or even on Chinese territory itself, or in a third country. The family left behind in Tibet or Xinjiang is often used as a means of exerting pressure. Explicit threats are made implying that it will no longer be possible to return to visit family or that the family could suffer serious disadvantages if the refugees refuse to cooperate. In some cases, the focus is also on benefits that are offered to the refugees in return. So, while pressure can be exerted to persuade refugees to become informers, they, in turn, can exert pressure on the other diaspora members. Inasmuch as they submit under pressure to act as informers, they are both victims and perpetrators at the same time. A recent detailed study commissioned by the Norwegian Ministry of Education is dedicated to the topic of refugee espionage and analyses the Uyghur community in Norway in a dedicated chapter.³³

B. Co-Optation

Hypothesis: "Actors who can be attributed to the PRC co-opt centrally-positioned persons with good networks in the Tibetan and Uyghur communities in Switzerland, either themselves or via intermediaries, in order to spy on and put pressure on the diaspora communities."

In contrast to refugee espionage, co-optation centers on people who tend to have arrived in earlier waves of migration and therefore have a stable residence status in the destination country. These processes tend to be associated with economically better-off and sometimes highly respected families from the respective diaspora communities, who in any case occupy an active and central position and maintain good networks. In the case of refugee espionage, cooperation with the PRC is obtained by using the security of relatives in Tibet or Xinjiang as a means of repressive pressure. In some cases, however, co-operation is linked to the credible conviction that it will ultimately do good (e.g. for Tibetans in Tibet). In the case of co-opted persons, it is

often the case that their deeply rooted and complex family structures in the target country are mobilized by various positive incentives to spy on, put pressure on and influence the diaspora communities. Differentiating between (refugee) espionage, spying and co-optation can be difficult in individual cases, but has potentially complex effects on the exile communities. This is discussed in more detail in section 4.6.

C. Issuing of Official Documents as an Instrument of Pressure

Hypothesis: "The PRC uses the issuing of official documents as a means of exerting pressure on members of the Tibetan and Uyghur communities living in Switzerland who require an entry permit for Chinese territory."

In the case of members of the Tibetan and Uyghur communities without Chinese citizenship who wish to travel to Tibet or Xinjiang for family reasons, for example, and require a visa, entry permit or other PRC travel document, the issuing of such official documents can be used as a means of exerting pressure. The granting of these documents can thus be linked to certain actions on the part of the applicant and non-compliant behavior can be penalized. In this way, compliant behavior is ensured in advance and, in some cases, recompense is also demanded. The issuing or renewal of travel documents, especially passports, is also used as an instrument to force people to travel to China or to establish contact with Chinese authorities.

D. Forced Repatriation

Hypothesis: "Actors that can be attributed to the PRC operate on Swiss territory in order to persuade members of the Tibetan and Uyghur communities to return to China."

Members of the Tibetan and Uyghur communities are coerced to return to Chinese territory against their will through actions that fall on a spectrum between pressure and coercion. The coercion can be carried out

in various ways, for example through the instrument of obtaining identity documents that are only issued locally, through threats or violence against relatives or through kidnapping and abduction to Chinese territory, but sometimes also through the promise of certain benefits. Numerous forced returns to the PRC have been documented for various countries (e.g. Egypt, Thailand). According to reports, the people concerned are threatened with imprisonment, torture or other serious consequences in China.

E. Pressure through Messaging

Hypothesis: "Members of the Tibetan and Uyghur communities in Switzerland are pressurized with messages via various communication channels by actors that can be attributed to the PRC."

In this context, the means of pressure are understood to be messages with which members of the Tibetan and Uyghur communities are pressurized through explicit or implicit threats. As with process 'F. Observation and Photography,' pressure through messaging functions both as a means of intimidation to refrain from certain actions and as an instrument of gathering information. The frequency of these pressure messages is usually directly related to the political commitment of the addressees and increases when this commitment is strengthened. According to reports, the pressure messages usually originate from Chinese territory, e.g. via WeChat as direct threats from Chinese security officials, but also as messages from private individuals, such as family members, who often send a specific message under pressure. Sometimes these messages are also sent by actors in the target country, including the Chinese embassy and consulate, or by other members of the community – although the originators often remain unclear.

F. Observation and Photography

Hypothesis: "Politically-exposed members of the Tibetan and Uyghur communities are systematically observed, photographed and/or

filmed on Swiss territory by actors who can be attributed to the PRC."

Members of the Tibetan and Uyghur communities are reported to be regularly observed and recorded worldwide during political rallies, meetings with other community members or other everyday activities by actors who can be attributed to the PRC or its representations in the target state. This applies to all Tibetan and Uyghur community members who are politically active, although the recording of photographic and video material is carried out using more elaborate methods in the case of particularly exposed activists. The observation, photography and filming alone create an intimidating effect. However, the recorded material is also used for personal identification and can be used as a means of exerting pressure on the family, especially when forwarded to the security police in Tibet and Xinjiang.

G. Surveillance of Communication

Hypothesis: "Actors attributed to the PRC monitor private and public communications of members of the Tibetan and Uyghur communities in Switzerland."

The private communications of members of the Tibetan and Uyghur communities with family members and acquaintances, especially when the latter are located on Chinese territory, are reportedly monitored via telephone and apps such as WeChat by actors attributed to the PRC.³⁴ The monitoring is mostly used to intercept private information. In addition, there is a considerable effect of uncertainty caused by actual or even only suspected surveillance, which arises when large circles of potential addressees begin to assume that they too are being monitored. Messages that are publicly shared by community members via social media platforms are also used to gather information about them. The reports also express the suspicion that telephone calls between community members in the target state are being intercepted. The surveillance of communications is usually carried out in secret.

H. Cyber Attacks

Hypothesis: "Actors that can be attributed to the PRC target members of the Tibetan and Uyghur communities living in Switzerland via hacker attacks or server attacks in virtual space (e.g. in social networks), disrupt private communication and/or attempt to obtain private information about them."

The phenomenon of cyber attacks concerns targeted attacks on members of the Tibetan and Uyghur communities online, with the aim of monitoring, intimidating, threatening or collecting information.³⁵ According to reports, the attacks primarily affect the homepages and private and community email accounts of Tibetan organizations and their members, which are restricted in their function or even rendered inoperable by spam and server attacks, and often occur in connection with extraordinary events related to the PRC and associated actions by the community organizations.³⁶ In addition, attempts are made to collect information about these organizations and their members through various forms of phishing and malware. In some cases, politically-exposed community members are also targeted through a wide range of hacking and phishing attempts. The attacks appear to be organized from China.³⁷ In contrast to digital surveillance, cyber attacks are not carried out in secret, but are often directly visible to those affected.

I. Physical Violence

Hypothesis: "Actors of official Chinese representations in Switzerland use physical violence against members of the Tibetan and Uyghur communities on Swiss territory, for example at political rallies or public events."

The category of physical violence includes different forms of direct physical attacks on members of the Tibetan and Uyghur communities in Switzerland. Various forms of physical violence and attacks are known from cases worldwide, ranging from minor

assaults to homicide. The violence often occurs during or in connection with political rallies, demonstrations or public events.

J. Abuse of International Lists

Hypothesis: "The PRC specifically places highly-exposed members of the Tibetan and Uyghur communities on international lists, such as so-called 'red alerts' at Interpol or sanctions lists at the UN."

Various international mechanisms aim to simplify cooperation between states in criminal prosecution and the fight against terrorism by using international lists in which suspicious persons can be flagged. The international criminal police organization Interpol uses the so-called "red notice" for this purpose, i.e. a request from an Interpol member state addressed to law enforcement authorities worldwide to locate the whereabouts of a person and provisionally arrest them in order to hand them over to law enforcement or prison authorities.³⁸ States can place persons suspected of terrorism on the UN Security Council's sanctions lists.³⁹ The entry on such a list can be contested. However, until a possible review and de-listing takes place, an entry means a massive restriction of the rights of the person concerned, in particular their freedom of movement but also their property rights.

3.3 Addressees: The Tibetan and Uyghur Communities in Switzerland

Tibetans and Uyghurs are two different ethnic groups from areas of the present-day People's Republic of China. The history and politics of the Tibetan and Uyghur communities at the global level are covered extensively in the research literature. However, the literature and data available on these communities in Switzerland – especially with regard to the much smaller Uyghur community – is limited.⁴⁰ A recent master's thesis is available on the aspect of surveillance of Tibetans in Switzerland.⁴¹

History and Structure of the Tibetan Community in Switzerland

According to recent media reports, there are around 145,000 Tibetans living in exile worldwide, of which around 7,500 live in Switzerland.⁴² The number of Tibetans in Switzerland has risen steadily since the 1960s. The figures quoted in the media are generally in line with the estimates of the experts interviewed for the research report, although it was noted that the number of unreported cases could well be higher.

Tibetan immigration to Switzerland can be roughly divided into three periods: The first group came to Switzerland mainly as refugees in the 1960s, tended to be economically better off and quickly found access to the labor market. The next generation, who arrived in Switzerland from the 1980s onwards, often already had relatives in the country and were able to enter through family reunification procedures. Tibetans from this period are generally 'well integrated' and often speak the local languages fluently. Tibetans who came to Switzerland in the course of the third wave of migration in the 2000s are experiencing a changed, in their view more restrictive asylum concept, which means that not all of them receive a right of residence in Switzerland. Members of this third group tend to be less well integrated, communicate primarily in Tibetan, sometimes also in Hindi and English, and therefore live in more precarious circumstances than their predecessors from the first two generations.⁴³

The Tibetan community in Switzerland is highly organized. One of the most important organizations in the country is the *Tibetan Community in Switzerland and Liechtenstein* (TCSL).⁴⁴ The TCSL, which has around 5,000 members, is numerically the largest Tibetan association and serves as a link between the Tibetan Government-in-Exile and Tibetans in Switzerland. Some organizations restrict their membership to Tibetans or people with a Tibetan background (TCSL and, with very few exceptions, the *Tibetan Youth Association in Europe* TYAE). In others, non-Tibetan Swiss are also active, such as in the *Swiss-Tibetan Friendship Association* (GSTF). Tibetans in Switzerland also have a strong transnational network, often through national umbrella organizations in other countries and so-called "Tibet Offices" (e.g. in Geneva).

History and Structure of the Uyghur Community in Switzerland

The first major movement of Uyghur refugees from the 1990s onwards was from western China to the Turkic-speaking countries near the PRC (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan) and to Turkey, where the largest Uyghur diaspora community has since formed. Some Uyghur refugees then left these countries to settle in Europe, the USA or Canada. Some of them also came to Switzerland. According to various estimates, around 150 Uyghurs live in Switzerland today.⁴⁵ In contrast to the Tibetans, the number of Uyghurs in Switzerland is therefore very modest. The Uyghurs in Switzerland are organized in the *Uyghur Association Switzerland* and the *Justice for Uyghurs Association*. The *World Uyghur Congress* (WUC) plays an important role as an influential global mouthpiece for the Uyghur diaspora community.

4. Research Findings

In the following, the findings on infringements of fundamental rights and exertions of pressure against members of the Tibetan and Uyghur Communities in Switzerland are presented. Section 4.1 discusses which actors attributable to the PRC might possibly instigate repression against members of the Tibetan and Uyghur communities in Switzerland. The main part of section 4.2 outlines the ascertainable forms of exertions of pressure by actors of the PRC in Switzerland. The aim of the systematization of forms of exertions of pressure is to come up with clear and maximally reliable statements for the probability of each hypothesis. The presentation of the findings is guided by the taxonomy of Chapter 3 and the ten theoretically conceivable forms of exertions of pressure outlined there (A.–J.). The Tibetan and Uyghur communities are discussed separately in each case.

Subsequently, Section 4.3 covers the role of the Swiss authorities, whereas Section 4.4 focuses on the Tibetan Government-in-Exile and the TCSL. As distinct from Section 4.2, these two parts of the research report do not address actually-occurring forms of repression, but actions (or omissions) that leave members of these communities with an impression of being pressured and thus lead to an indirect restriction regarding the exercise of fundamental rights. It is thus a question of perceived pressure. Section 4.5 deals briefly with the possible exertion of pressure by the PRC related to Tibetan and Uyghur interests against Swiss institutions of higher education and Swiss authorities. Finally, Section 4.6 presents and analyses four cross-cutting issues that are reflected in several forms of repression: A. Family in Tibet and Xinjiang as means of pressure, B. Gray Areas of Espionage/Surveillance (Snitching), C. Fault lines within the exile communities, D. Climate of fear. These cross-cutting issues contextualize the observed forms of attempts at repression and thus allow for an actual assessment of the situation of the Tibetan and Uyghur communities in Switzerland.

4.1 Initiator Analysis for the PRC

The purpose of the following passages is to determine the possible instigators of exertions of pressure on the side of the PRC as well as other actors that can be attributed to the PRC. This is relevant due to the fact that the toolbox of transnational repression also includes intimidation, which can be particularly effective if the perpetrators are openly and explicitly recognizable. With those forms of repression where the initiator remains in the hidden and unrecognized, the task is a great deal harder. An analysis of the Party-State and its organs devoted specifically to Tibetan and Uyghur matters can, however, reveal congruencies between the documented exertions of pressure in target countries and the demonstrable fields of duty of these actors.

The preamble of the Constitution of the PRC summons the people of China to "fight against those domestic and foreign forces that are hostile to and undermine our country's socialist system."⁴⁶ The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) leads these efforts at fighting enemies and opposition forces at home and abroad. Tibetans and Uyghurs, who the Chinese Party-State takes as seeking independence for their territories, belong to the core of these opposition forces to be fought against, also known as the "five poisons."⁴⁷ These movements are considered dangerous since they operate in the PRC as well as abroad and are thus perceived as a threat to the political order and to security.⁴⁸ Monitoring and fighting these movements abroad is a central task of Chinese intelligence services.⁴⁹ The civil intelligence services, i.e. the *Ministry of State Security* (MSS, 中华人民共和国国家安全部, in short: 国安部) and the *Ministry of Public Security* (MPS, 中华人民共和国公安部, in short: 公安部) play a particularly important role.⁵⁰ The overseas operations of the MSS are primarily focused on counterespionage and the fight against "terrorist groups" and dissidents.⁵¹ Within the MSS, the Second

Bureau for "Overseas Operations" and the Sixth Bureau for Counterespionage and "Overseas Dissidents" stand out.⁵² The bureaus at the provincial level in Tibet and Xinjiang are also relevant actors, as are some other bureaus such as the *Shanghai State Security Bureau* (SSSB), which is said to target the Tibetan and Uyghur diaspora communities.⁵³ In Tibet and Xinjiang, the local MPS-run *Public Security Bureaus* (PSB, 公安局) play a significant role. In addition to the civilian intelligence services, military intelligence services are also allegedly involved in specific issues.⁵⁴

Of the departments under the CCP Central Committee, the United Front Work Department (UFWD, 中共中央统一战线工作部, in short: 统战部) and the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office (OCAO, 国务院侨务办公室) of the State Council (but subordinated to UFWD) deserve special mention. In addition to the Seventh (Tibet) and Eighth (Xinjiang) Bureaus of the UFWD, research has shown the significance of the China Association for Preservation and Development of Tibetan Culture (CAPDTC, 中国西藏文化保护与发展协会) and the Beijing based China Tibetology Research Center (CTRC, 中国藏学研究中心). The fact that these latter actors are not non-governmental organizations in the conventional sense is already evident from their names, as the use of 中国 («China») indicates their affiliation to the Party-State apparatus.⁵⁵ The close and complex, sometimes opaque, personal and institutional entanglements of these associations, offices and departments are central to an understanding of their political activities abroad. Senior functionaries often hold successive or even simultaneous positions within the state administration as well as in the party. The UFWD and its subordinate organizations in particular serve the MSS as a cover for its overseas operations.⁵⁶

In Switzerland, circles affiliated to the united front and the official representations of the PRC, i.e. the Embassy in Bern, the Consulate in Zurich and the Missions in Geneva, are of particular significance. The representations in Switzerland often carry out tasks in communication, coordination and local guidance not only for the PRC as State, but also for the CCP as

Party.⁵⁷ The representations actively work on issues related to Tibet and Xinjiang. Some employees are specifically in charge of the Tibetan and Uyghur communities, regarding consular affairs, but also concerning matters pertaining to the united front and intelligence work. The representations, in particular the Consulate in Zurich, also make use of employees of Tibetan origin.

Whether and to what extent the PRC actors mentioned here are connected to the events and actions observed in the context of this research report will be shown in the following section on the attempted or actual exertion of pressure by the PRC on the Tibetan and Uyghur communities in Switzerland.

4.2 Exertions of Pressure by the PRC against the Tibetan and Uyghur Communities

A. Refugee Espionage

In the light of corresponding statements in the interviews conducted, insights from existing research, and extremely well-evidenced court cases in other European countries (some with much smaller communities than those in Switzerland), there is a high probability that Tibetan and Uyghur refugees or persons with a refugee background settled in Switzerland are pressured into spying on other members of the respective communities and passing on information. Furthermore, it is safe to assume with high probability that the attempts at pressuring are, in many cases, successful.

As to the instigators of these forms of exertions of pressure, various European intelligence services emphasize "China" and "its intelligence services" in connection with refugee espionage observed in the respective countries.⁵⁸ There is a detailed court judgment from 2018 on two mutually intertwined cases of refugee espionage in a European country, which unequivocally identifies by name an employee of a Chinese embassy in a neighboring country as a

member of the MSS.⁵⁹ According to the FIS, "dozens of intelligence officers" of the PRC are active in Switzerland, "working under diplomatic or consular cover," or often also under other guises, targeting their activities "mainly at the respective diaspora communities" and taking "an interest in Uyghurs and Tibetans (and their organizations) in Switzerland."⁶⁰ There are important indicators in favor of attributing the exertions of pressure in Switzerland to actors of the PRC, i.e. persons that can be ascribed to the PRC, for instance, employees of the local Chinese representations or members of the Chinese foreign intelligence services.

Tibetan Community

For the Tibetan community in Switzerland, this practice has been pointed out in the research literature.⁶¹ The interviews conducted for this report also show that many members of the Tibetan community in Switzerland harbor strong suspicions towards other community members whom they believe "work for the Chinese" in Switzerland.

The distrust is particularly strong vis-à-vis recently-arrived asylum seekers. These asylum seekers, who have only left Tibet in recent years and still have close family there, are – as one interviewed person recounts it – more susceptible to attempts at pressuring: "It has somewhat changed, [...] with the dynamic that this new generation brings along. Yes, their own origin, their biography just provides the space to give something to them, e.g. a visa, which they urgently need. This is how they get their political affiliation. Or snitching and so on. [...]. This new group has opened something like gray zones. Not that they did that on purpose, but it simply is a fact. Because they have parents in Tibet."

In the interviews, it is repeatedly reported that acquaintances from the circle of recently-arrived Tibetan refugees have been contacted by the "secret service" of the PRC and thereafter, unlike the majority of members of the Tibetan community in Switzerland, were able to travel back to Tibet to visit their families. In one case, it is described for example, how one person "with an F-permit" had been issued travel documents,

allegedly "by the Chinese," with which the person could travel via Germany back to Tibet without the SEM finding out. In several cases, the interviewee's suspicion of refugee espionage also arises from the fact that Tibetan refugees without gainful employment in Switzerland apparently had fewer money problems after purportedly having been approached by PRC actors.

In the context of cases of this kind, interviewees also mention that persons who previously had not been actively involved in the Swiss Tibetan community suddenly appear on a regular basis at meetings of associations or at demonstrations after they had travelled to Tibet or had allegedly been spotted with PRC actors. One respondent tells, for instance, of a refugee who regularly turned up at community events to film those present, while it is incomprehensible how someone who has fled can afford the expensive filming equipment. Moreover, a number of interviewed people recount that they had encountered refugees at such events who were hitherto unknown to them but who expressed intimate knowledge about their relatives in Switzerland and in Tibet, what in itself they perceived to be a threat.

Uyghur Community

There is a case from the Swiss Uyghur community in which a man, who today lives in Switzerland, recounts how officials in Xinjiang pressured him before his departure, wanting him to work for them when abroad. When he did not comply with this demand after exiting the territory of the PRC, he asserts that his parents lost their employment in Xinjiang, and that he regularly received threatening messages. Even after arriving in Switzerland, he claims he continues to receive such messages from people of "the Chinese secret service" asking him to collect information about other members of the Uyghur community. He mentions voice messages in Chinese and Uyghur language. Every now and then he would receive phone and video calls from numbers in the PRC, which he has never answered. Some such voice messages come from his mother's phone number in Xinjiang. The receiver is evidently being held out to her. She cries and has a shaky voice,

and requests him to accept the calls from the intelligence officers. Sometimes the messages include photographs of him. The person concerned points out acquaintances [also in exile] who experience similar events.

B. Co-Optation

The detailed accounts of co-optation by members of the Tibetan and Uyghur communities in the interviews conducted, as well as the repeated and independent mentions of the same co-opted persons and families by interviewees make it appear very likely that co-optation processes are taking place in Switzerland. For the Tibetan community, the very large overlap with the initiator analysis underscores this finding. A publicly available report by the Organization Department of the CCP in a Chinese city about the life and activities of a high-ranking Tibetan functionary in the UFWD features a description of events in Switzerland from many years ago, detailing co-optation processes and the successful infiltration of the Tibetan community. The functionary in question was working at an official representation of the PRC and was registered with the FDFA as a consul. The report also emphasized that the "effective work" of this functionary at the time opened "the door for the work with expatriate Tibetans in Europe" and laid "a solid basis for future work."⁶²

Tibetan Community

As also confirmed in the research literature,⁶³ many interviewees from the Tibetan community believe that co-opted Tibetans in Switzerland work with the Chinese government. It is striking how the same names of certain individuals and of whole families from the Tibetan community are mentioned time and again. Families descending from "aristocrats" or from former high officials in Tibet are supposed to be particularly in the spotlight, because they continue to occupy positions of importance in the community. Concerning the co-optation of high-ranking Tibetan families, a strongly corrosive and mistrust-furthering effect on

the whole Tibetan community in Switzerland is frequently mentioned.

During interviews, the suspicion of co-optation is for instance uttered against persons and families who seem to know short cuts to the Chinese authorities and who routinely participate at events hosted by the Chinese Embassy in Switzerland: "I know many people [here in Switzerland] who are in contact with the Embassy. In 2010, there was a New Year's celebration. At the time, there were no celebrations in Tibet. It was a dark year, there were many self-immolations. Still, there was a celebration in Zurich [hosted by the Consulate]. There were many Swiss Tibetans attending." The special relationship to the Embassy in Bern and the Consulate in Zurich is also demonstrated by the fact that these persons know facts and details that suggest a privileged access to insider knowledge. As an example for this, information is cited that has been articulated only in the highly confidential context of an asylum procedure. Suspicion also falls on those members of the community who travel to Tibet frequently or for a longer period of time, who are doing business there, or who visit prominent political prisoners there. In this regard, cases are also mentioned in which members of the Swiss Tibetan community have participated at official celebrations in Lhasa organized by the CCP or are said to have met the General Secretary of the CCP.

The existence of attempts at co-opting members of the Tibetan community in Switzerland by the CCP is further corroborated through statements in the interviews about the activities of employees of the Chinese Consulate. One respondent said: "There is also a Tibetan working at the Chinese Consulate in Zurich. [...]. If it is not him, then his predecessor [...]. His main job is to check what the Tibetan community is doing." Another person, who could credibly show to be well familiar with internal affairs of the Consulate, recounted that those employees working on Tibet in the Consulate deliberately build friendships with the well-connected family heads in the community, who would partly receive favors and, in turn, partly had to render services. Such return services comprise, as several respondents point out, the exchange of information on politically-

engaged members of the Swiss Tibetan community, public pronouncement against actions of Tibetan associations or the repetition of Chinese propaganda talking points about Tibet, for instance, in letters to the editor in the newspaper.

With regard to a name that was mentioned in the interviews repeatedly as an informant of the PRC – and about whom apparently "everyone" knows about, according to one respondent even before travelling to Switzerland – an explosive suspicion is expressed, insofar as the person in question has for several years performed a task at the federal authorities in Bern at a position relevant to the Tibetan issue. That person "is totally at the source." This is about having access to insider information on the Swiss Tibetan community that is of use to the Chinese Party-State. As early as in 2016, the respective federal office had been notified about the suspicion first orally, then also in written form, but the matter was left unanswered.⁶⁴ In another interview, it is pointed out that the same person had been seen by several people at different occasions together with employees of the Chinese Consulate: the person was spotted "by accident at the train station, in the company of Chinese Embassy staff. The person was very uncomfortable, staring at the ground." Another respondent adds that for "Tibetans who need a visa, they know that this person has access. If one is on good terms with this person, then one receives a visa without a question."

Independent of the just mentioned case, a further interviewee claimed that personal information raised in a confidential official interrogation by a federal authority had leaked to a presumably co-opted family, and from there back to the interrogated person, who was thus put under pressure. Given the value of such knowledge for intelligence service actors and efforts at repression, such official settings appear as reasonable targets for such services. One would not only be amiss, however, but also in the wrong according to the knowledge gained in this research, if one were to infer from single reported cases to a general suspicion against members of the Tibetan community who are employed or mandated with tasks by the authorities.

Uyghur Community

Concerning the Swiss Uyghur community, individual persons are equally said to cooperate with the Chinese Embassy. "Also a few Uyghurs, who live [in Switzerland], do this bridge, schooling, student exchanges and such things [organized by the PRC]. [...] There are also some people who work a lot together with the Chinese." Besides co-optation, there is also a wide-spread assumption about spying in the Uyghur community shared by some of the interviewees, even if one of them mentions that many are being forced to do this.

Other interviewees describe concrete recruitment efforts to gain information about the activities of members of the Uyghur community.⁶⁵ For instance, one person was asked to come forth with services in return for an exit permit in the context of a visit by a relative. Another respondent reported an unexpected voice message and also a WhatsApp message by a sibling, but from an unknown number with a country code of a neighboring European country and after more than four years of lack of communication. In the messages, the sibling's voice apparently sounded unnatural, as if somebody else was present. In subsequent days, the sibling would call again and again. As a sign of gratitude for the established contact, the respondent was then expected to talk to a man of the State Security. When the respondent finally gives in, the counterpart is extremely friendly, but knows also about all the respondent's activities in Switzerland and wishes to entertain a regular exchange. Several interviewed persons recount independently from each other about a Swiss, who had previously worked in China and who they say has tried to recruit Uyghurs for spying purposes. In return for information, the family back in Xinjiang was promised relief.

C. Issuing of Official Documents

Existing research literature and media reports on Tibetans in Switzerland discuss how the issuance of visa is regularly used as an instrument of pressure, trying to have unwelcome persons stop their political

engagement.⁶⁶ The results of the interviews reveal that members of the Tibetan community with Swiss citizenship regularly do not receive permission by the Chinese Embassy to travel to Tibet.

Politically exposed persons seem equally affected as Tibetans without a particularly elevated profile. Merely persons who bowing to the pressure have restricted themselves, their freedom of expression or otherwise, and persons whose travel can be instrumentalized, have a better chance of receiving a travel permit. This represents a major barrier to involved members of the community, particularly if they have relatives in Tibet. The practice of giving or refusing visa, but also the issuance of other official documents, e.g. identity documents, is an effective incentive and leverage for the PRC vis-à-vis members of the Swiss Tibetan community. The volume of statements to this end in the interviews strongly indicates that Chinese authorities also frequently use this instrument of pressure in Switzerland. In the interviews conducted with members of the Swiss Uyghur community, the issuance of official documents was not explicitly raised as a problem. Interviewed members of the Uyghur community who in some single cases reported to have visited Chinese territory after their arrival in Switzerland did so having a Chinese passport at the time in question. Meanwhile, for a large majority of Uyghur refugees in Switzerland, a trip back home, even if desired, is categorically ruled out due to security reasons.

Tibetan Community

A large portion of interviewed people claimed that "Swiss with a Tibetan background" would undergo a "different procedure for a visa" to travel to Chinese state territory than other Swiss do. In this particular context of the issue of visa by the PRC, the critique is raised that Switzerland would not do enough to protect Swiss citizens with a Tibetan background, even if it remains unclear what exactly is expected of the Swiss authorities.⁶⁷

Several interviewed persons report hardly ever to receive a visa from the PRC in Switzerland to travel to

Tibet, particularly if they are active politically. The impossibility to travel to Tibet is described as the "price" for political engagement and as "normal." One respondent narrates the practice of being photographed at a protest and how these photos later are used for refusing a visa: "You go to ask for a visa and then they can show: 'You were at a protest'." For some of the people, it is apparently clear from the beginning that they will anyways not receive a visa. One interviewee describes the visa modalities as follows: "This access and the prospect of traveling to Tibet are really how Tibetans are captured." Others refer to visa applications denied without a stated reason and speak of "arbitrariness."

Politically exposed persons may under certain circumstances, however, travel to Tibet, according to one respondent, if they are so well-known that the journey can be "exploited" by the Chinese State for propaganda purposes. Some of the interviewed people addressed the worry that they would be instrumentalized by the embassy for the issue of a visa and told about sometimes subtler sometimes more straightforward requests for services in return. A visa would be issued if one did this or that, or communicated positively about this or that. Another person mentioned that one had to declare in writing at the Chinese Embassy not to publicly oppose China and not to support the Dalai Lama: "you actually have to say 'yes, the Dalai Lama is a splitter of unity'." Other responses concern the demand for "tips" to employees at the Consulate: "[An acquaintance of mine] had been to Tibet. [I asked her:] 'How did you do that?' She had gone directly to the [person at the Consulate] and given [him] 100 Swiss Francs together with the application: 'You, go and have a cup of coffee!' One week later, she received a phone call: 'Come and fetch your visa.' Oh my God, that was quick [laughs]." Besides visa, the issuance of other identity and travel documents are also said to be used as instruments of pressure. One interviewed person recounts a situation in which an employee at the Chinese Consulate initially refused the application for issuance of an identity document, but then suggested the possibility "to have a meeting with a Tibetan who works at the Chinese Consulate. In this way, under certain circumstances, there might in the

end still be a passport or a document for you."

Regarding the question whether or not to engage in services in return for official documents, those interviewed for this report mention a variety of reactions by Tibetans. One respondent comments on the mentioned point about signing a declaration condemning the Dalai Lama: "There are some who say 'I would never do this. Never sign. And that is why I am not even going there.' And, then, there are some who say 'It is simple. I have family there and my family is more important than a piece of paper. And what I think in my heart and what I sign, these are two different things.' [...]. And this is how they have a hold over them. This is how it works. And if they do not have a hold over them, then they have a hold over their relatives. And this is how this pressure works with co-optation."

Those who have "cut the deal" would after their return "be constantly called up and urged to disclose any piece of information about other Tibetans here in Switzerland." It is expected, a respondent says, that in the aftermath of a trip to Tibet a service in return is owed.

D. Repatriation between Pressure and Force

The existing research literature and media coverage on Switzerland report no cases of forced repatriation concerning the Tibetan and Uyghur communities. In the context of the present research report, no cases were mentioned in which direct violence was used in Switzerland to abduct or forcefully bring a person back to China. The interviews nonetheless reveal individual cases involving attempts to pressure people into returning to China, referring to family still living there and offering incentives. The respondents mostly place the actors of such approaches as being from the civil intelligence services, without referring specifically to the MSS or the MPS – the entities responsible for such tasks according to the initiator analysis.

Furthermore, the practice of forced repatriation by the PRC – classified as "credible"⁶⁸ by the Office of the

United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights – has had repercussions for the Tibetan and Uyghur communities in Switzerland. For example, some members refrain from traveling to countries where forced repatriation is believed to have taken place.

Tibetan Community

One respondent from the Tibetan community in Switzerland stated that he repeatedly received "calls from the Chinese Embassy or from China" encouraging him to return and promising him "well-paid employment." One of these calls came from a relative in Tibet, urging him to travel back. During the conversation, this relative signaled that someone was listening in – although it was unclear whether the individual was physically present or merely monitoring the call. The Swiss-Tibetan politely declined, expressing gratitude for the offer but explaining that he could not accept, given that he was married with children in Switzerland. He also mentioned that other Tibetans had received similar calls.

Uyghur Community

A member of the Uyghur community recounts that "about a decade ago," they were first pressured by phone from Xinjiang and later in person in Switzerland by PRC actors, in an attempt to induce their return. "Officials from the Chinese state security service visited my father's home [in Xinjiang] to investigate me. My father was extremely worried and called me. Because of my father's age and health, I told him to give them my number. A few days later, these officials contacted me, saying my father was old and that I should come back to support him. I openly stated that I had asylum status in Switzerland and couldn't just return. I believe it was July of the same year when someone with a Bern telephone number called, claiming to be from Chinese state security, and said he wanted to meet me in Muri near Bern. At first, I refused because I was working long hours. Then they threatened that my father would suffer the consequences if I declined. Ultimately, I had to agree and arranged to meet them at Bundesplatz in Bern as a precaution. There were three of them – one Uyghur [and two Han Chinese who spoke Uyghur].

They tried to persuade me to return home with them. I politely declined, using the excuse that I would soon become Swiss and would visit home afterward. Once they left, the authorities increased the pressure on my family: my relatives were imprisoned without cause, and their home was searched several times in the middle of the night. My family was harassed without reason. My father subsequently became seriously ill and died of a cerebral hemorrhage in 2012. Since then, the authorities have not contacted me again."

E. Pressure through Messaging

A large number of experiences reported in the interviews also relate to the phenomenon of pressure by messaging, supported by the research literature and media reports from Switzerland.⁶⁹ Some of the interviewees' accounts can be corroborated with screenshots and audio material.⁷⁰ In addition, one person who had played an important role in the research for this report was contacted shortly afterwards by a Tibetan in Switzerland and confronted with unusual questions. The person had not heard from this Tibetan for a long time. All in all, based on the data available, it must be assumed that members of the Tibetan and Uyghur communities in Switzerland are regularly subject to pressure through messaging by PRC actors.

Tibetan Community

The interviews with members of the Tibetan community in Switzerland yielded various descriptions of such pressuring. Many of those interviewed report receiving recorded audio messages from the Chinese Embassy. The calls are made from Swiss numbers, once also with the number of a parcel service. When called back, the Chinese Embassy's answering machine plays an audio recording containing a request to deliver documents. One respondent suspects that the purpose of these actions is to "confirm that the person using the mobile phone is really the one they expect." One of the

interviewees says that his daughter had also received such calls with taped messages from the Chinese Embassy at a time when she was more politically active. Later, when she was concentrating on her studies, she no longer received calls. His politically engaged wife has also often received calls. According to the interviewee, this shows that one purpose of these tape messages is to intimidate politically active members of the community.

One respondent, whose work involves the Tibetan diaspora, received anonymous phone calls from China, and later also an email from someone who presented himself as an employee of a company in Switzerland for which the respondent had previously worked during their studies. The email asked for the respondent's contact details so that a surprise can be delivered: "This email [...] was from a fake former employer of mine who asked me for my address to send me a gift. And when I looked for the person [who had signed the email], they actually worked in a Chinese restaurant [laughs]."

Several community members report explicit attempts at intimidation. One interviewee reported receiving a message from the Chinese police via WeChat via their uncle in the PRC: "You have to think about your future." The uncle had only just been picked up by the police. A Tibetan-Swiss describes a case of an exposed member of the community in which "telephone terror" had taken place. He had received "horrible pictures by text message," "very gruesome ones, of injured [Tibetan] people and so on," from Swiss numbers. The Tibetan-Swiss subsequently sent a copy of the files and a screenshot to the Swiss authorities, but never heard anything back.

Uyghur Community

The Uyghur Community also provides various such reports. One person describes how some time ago, while still using a landline telephone, they regularly received calls from the "Chinese police" at four o'clock in the

morning. This was not so much threatening as simply harassment. Another respondent describes an Uyghur friend who has been in Switzerland for almost 10 years and feels very scared. The Chinese police has contacted her two or three times via WeChat, telling her she had now studied long enough and should come back, a job would be offered to her. An Uyghur woman recounts that last autumn she received a family photo via an unknown number. She was surprised and asked who had sent the message. It was her husband's brother. Two or three days later, he told her that someone wanted to speak to her. He told her the name of the person. This person then told her during the conversation: "If you are quiet over there and do nothing, no activities, then people are happy here. If you continue to be very active, then people can't live in peace here." This "agent" was on the phone together with the husband's brother.

One respondent reports having received three or four phone calls from the police in Xinjiang with threats after giving an interview in a newspaper. The respondent became so angry that they "snapped" and "threw the phone against the wall." The police had said: "You shouldn't do anything. We monitor everything you do. Don't think that just because you're abroad that our hands don't reach there. We do everywhere... we can make things happen anywhere." After changing the phone and the number, the calls stopped. Another interviewee who was very politically engaged tells how he was regularly contacted by Chinese callers whom he did not know. They introduced themselves as "friends of your cousin." He also knows a number of Uyghurs in Switzerland who have received calls from local authorities in Xinjiang. They had even openly stated "I'm from the police station, what are you doing, we wanted to come and visit you." This person also says that when he still had his Chinese passport, he was called by the Chinese Consulate in Zurich, and a man offered him help in Chinese, asked him about his situation in Switzerland and invited him to visit the Consulate for a chat.

F. Observation and Photography

In addition to a high volume of stories from the interviews, the research literature and media reports in Switzerland, there is also photographic evidence of the systematic observation, photography and filming of members of the Tibetan and Uyghur communities by Chinese actors in Switzerland (usually by photographing them back, etc.).⁷¹ It cannot be conclusively determined whether all Chinese actors who carry out these acts are acting directly on behalf of the Chinese Party-State or whether they sometimes act on their own initiative. Irrespective of this, it can be concluded from a wide variety of sources that the systematic observation, photography and filming of members of the Tibetan and Uyghur communities by Chinese actors in Switzerland does in fact occur on a regular basis.

Tibetan Community

There are various reports from the Tibetan community in Switzerland that confirm that Chinese actors in Switzerland are observing politically active individuals. One respondent states that during a visit to a Swiss canton, the Chinese Ambassador apparently suddenly told the local government council: "Yes, indeed, they already have a list of the people in the canton they are watching." The council member reportedly told the respondent this himself. Another interviewee states that at the International Olympic Committee in Lausanne, they had observed the same Chinese person following the group protesting against the organization of the Olympic Games in China. A Tibetan-Swiss woman describes the feeling of being watched as follows: "That was the first time I really felt threatened, I was so.... My heart started beating so fast, it just wasn't possible. We're demonstrating here, we have a permit, we're here on Swiss soil and I have the right to demonstrate, and I don't have to be watched, filmed, by the country that is virtually occupying us, here on the ground where I'm standing now... I realized then how intrusive it was..."

Many of the interviewees also assume that they will be photographed by Chinese authorities or recorded by the Consulate or Embassy cameras during rallies. Accordingly, some try to cover their faces, otherwise this has "immediate consequences"; for example, relatives in Tibet are summoned to the police station so that they can instruct their family members in Switzerland to "be a little quieter." Some interviewees state that they were able to identify individual employees of the Chinese Embassy or Consulate or representatives of Chinese organizations in Switzerland at the protests or events and observe them photographing or filming participants. Other respondents state that they had photographed the people observing them and could provide corresponding images. One interviewee stated that they had taken these pictures to the State Security Service, or the Federal Intelligence Service: "And then this State Security officer tells me, [...] yes, we know about that, and then he shows me his pictures, which he took at the same event, but from higher up, and there you can see us on Waisenhaus-Platz, like this [...] like a hundred Tibetans, pathetic, standing together in the square, it was super cold, and then he shows me Chinese Embassy people taking photos and doing things in like eight different places. And then there was someone there in a fur coat, and he tells me that the ambassador himself was there too"; he continued: "Of course we know about these things, and we sense somehow that things aren't going right. But we can write as much as we like in the reports, can't we? The political authorities take no notice of these things. It's simply lacking."

According to members of the Tibetan community, photographs are also taken on other occasions besides rallies. A Tibetan-Swiss tells how "Chinese people" also photograph or film in family-run shops in a Swiss town, where books by the Dalai Lama are sold and a Tibetan flag hangs, as if they will send it on to "I don't know who, the Embassy, yes."

Even greater efforts appear to be made in the case of politically prominent individuals. One such respondent describes being followed by a drone that recorded him on their daily walk not long ago. The person became

worried after this incident is repeated and the drone follows him to the front door. The person photographs and films the drone (the film recording is available). After making inquiries, he finds out that filming with drones is prohibited in this city and suspects that the Chinese Embassy is behind the action. The event leaves him feeling frightened: "Until now, I never thought that I had to worry about my safety in Switzerland. But I have to honestly admit that since this situation with the drone happened, I am well aware that it could be dangerous for me. That is very worrying. [...] I'm not afraid that the Chinese government might kill me here, shoot me or something, but I imagined that they could do something to me through a drone or other means, not poison me, but that they could do something so that I'm not able to function but not dead. That I'm in a condition where I can neither walk nor think."

Uyghur Community

Several respondents from the Uyghur community in Switzerland also reported being regularly photographed by "Chinese people" at demonstrations. One interviewee says that it used to be mostly people from the Chinese Embassy who took photos, for example at a rally in Bern where "three Chinese" took photos of the protesters. When he tried to confront them, they ran away. He could see them getting into a car with a CD (Corps Diplomatique) license plate in another street. He claims they were therefore "Chinese" who lived in Switzerland and had been paid to do so, such as the students who had received around 200 euros to greet Xi Jinping in Bern during his visit in 2017. But "Chinese people" are simply very conspicuous. Recently, he says, he has noticed that often African and North African journalists, as well as Swiss members of the socialist left, have been taking such photos. They even have name cards. One of them reportedly came from a Zimbabwean radio station and, when asked about this, said that he was not interested in the Uyghurs at all and that he was simply doing this for his news service. The interviewee assumes that these photos go to the Chinese Embassy and from there to China and the Chinese police.

Another interviewee fears that the photos taken during demonstrations will have consequences at home in Xinjiang. That is why he puts on glasses, for example, not because he is worried about himself, but because he is afraid for his mother, who still lives in Xinjiang. In one case, a respondent reports that the photos taken during demonstrations in Switzerland were placed on a police table in Xinjiang and their niece, brother and brother-in-law were confronted with them. The Chinese police had threatened the respondent's relatives with them: "If they don't stop their activities, you will be in our hands." The respondent's niece, who normally never makes phone calls, phoned them and recounted everything. Another interviewee reports that two days after family members took part in a demonstration in front of the Federal Palace in Bern in September 2020, her brother was arrested by the local authorities in Xinjiang. The authorities' explanation for the arrest was: "Your family has not cooperated with the government. They are carrying out actions against the government, separatist and terrorist actions." In addition, pictures of the demonstration in Switzerland were presented. The brother remains missing so far.

The Uyghur community also reports cases of individuals being observed. One Uyghur asylum seeker says that he gave an interview in a Swiss newspaper and then noticed on several occasions that he was being watched "by Chinese people," for example when looking for accommodation and on his way to school for his German course. It was usually a younger and an older woman whose faces he could remember well. At a bus stop, he noticed that one of the two people was taking photos of him with a mobile phone. When this happened again, he got off the bus and ran away. The two people followed closely behind him. He then turned round and said to them: "Hey! I can see that you're watching me for the third time now. If you carry on, I'll call the police. They just said, no, we are not doing anything like that and blah, blah." This conversation took place in Chinese. Another time he had seen them at a Tibetan rally. They were taking photos but left as soon as they noticed him. It was not always the same two people, but one woman was always the same. He claims he would recognize them all again immediately.

G. Surveillance of Communication

Based on interview findings and additional incidents – particularly those reported in the media – it appears highly likely that members of the Tibetan and Uyghur communities in Switzerland have their communications monitored by PRC actors, especially when using digital channels such as WeChat or WhatsApp to contact relatives in Tibet or Xinjiang. In certain instances, those affected can directly connect conversations they suspect were monitored to subsequent events. Research literature on the Tibetan and Uyghur communities in Switzerland also corroborates this phenomenon.⁷² However, as regards other forms of surveillance – such as possible wiretapping of telephone calls – it remains difficult to draw firm conclusions, since the evidence largely consists of personal impressions that are challenging to verify.

Tibetan Community

Several respondents from the Tibetan community say they believe they are being monitored by the "Chinese police," asking rhetorically how else the authorities could know everything about them, and "everything they do here in Switzerland." Another respondent noted that the "Tibetan government" in Dharamsala warns about surveillance, particularly regarding the use of WeChat. Such monitoring is difficult to detect, usually becoming apparent only through unexplained consequences. Some report an apparent intensification in surveillance of late: "With regard to me personally, I've noticed that surveillance has increased, because many of my relatives and acquaintances were questioned about their WeChat contact with me. For example, my brother was summoned to the police station and asked about his relationship with me and why we stay in touch. My uncle's daughter – my cousin – who lives as a nomad, bought a cell phone for the first time. She took a photo of the tent they pitched for winter and sent it to me via WeChat. Then the authorities arrived, confiscated her phone, and questioned her about why she was in contact with me and so on."

Uyghur Community

Respondents from the Uyghur community similarly believe they face extensive surveillance. One individual noted that they have to be extremely cautious about which words they use when on the phone with relatives. For instance, saying "salam alaikum," "Allah," "inshallah," "Uyghurs," or "East Turkestan" in Uyghur is strictly avoided. They sense they are being monitored: "You pick up the phone and hear this ssss in the background. I can't really describe it [laughs]. But you know there's a third person on the line. And you only hear that when you're calling China—you don't hear it when you're calling Bern." On one occasion, the interviewee's mother in Xinjiang forgot to watch her wording and said "inshallah" while saying goodbye. The police arrived an hour later. "We don't really know what happened. In any case, she didn't want to make another call for six months – just because of one word." Another Uyghur said that he keeps a separate phone to talk to his parents via WeChat and avoids mentioning politics. Another respondent mentioned that everyone fears their WhatsApp groups might be "controlled by China." A Uyghur refugee recalls suddenly noticing his phone "taking screenshots by itself. And then the phone just switched off. But at some point, I stopped caring. I deleted a few apps, and ever since, I've had the feeling it doesn't happen anymore." Another Uyghur attempted to call his father back home via a regular landline, but "other people picked up," making it clear to him that the call was being monitored.

H. Cyber Attacks

Cyberattacks on Tibetan organizations are widely reported by the respondents and also corroborated by their internet providers. In addition, isolated cyberattacks on politically prominent members of the Tibetan community can be substantiated by screenshots. Although the origin of some of these attacks can be traced back to China, the ultimate perpetrators cannot be definitively identified. Moreover, even with a noticeable increase in such incidents, it

remains unclear whether the crashes or other technical malfunctions experienced by individual community members were directly caused by these attacks. Less information is available regarding the Uyghur community. However, given that this community in Switzerland is significantly smaller and less organized, it does not necessarily follow that there are no cyberattacks on Uyghur individuals and organizations here.

Tibetan Community

Numerous indications of cyberattacks emerged from the interviews with Tibetan community members in Switzerland. One individual recounts having their email account shut down three times "for security reasons" by Swisscom "because I had so many hacking attempts on my account from Chinese servers" after inquiring with the official Chinese representation in Switzerland about visa requirements. On one occasion, following the 2008 unrest in Lhasa, the person read a report on the incident, and their computer "simply broke," requiring the purchase of a new one. They noted a significant rise in hacking attempts around the time of the Beijing Olympics – an observation confirmed by other respondents. Another respondent describes having to replace their laptop multiple times during that period due to system crashes. They mention discussing the issue with someone from the Federal Intelligence Service (FIS), who suggested the possibility of an investigation, though it never materialized. "My laptop just froze repeatedly – completely unusable. And once [laughs], there were these Chinese characters all over my screen." A different individual recounted how they were writing an autobiography in Word with Skype open in the background, when "strange messages in Chinese script" appeared, looking like nonsensical advertisements, popping up and eventually causing the laptop to crash beyond repair.

The server of the Swiss-Tibetan Friendship Society (GSTF) has also come under attack, as confirmed by Swisscom. One respondent tells of bizarre emails: "A few times we received messages apparently from a board member – or maybe it was a representative – and they asked really specific questions. The emails were super odd, and we thought, 'What on earth is this person talking about?' Then we wrote to them via text, and they said, 'That wasn't me.' It was super strange." When analyzing "where our newsletter is being accessed from," the same person noticed that one board member always seemed to open it from a "public ID in China," even though that individual was not in China at the time. This baffled them. Other respondents report fake emails sent in their name, seemingly designed to disrupt or undermine communication, as well as an uptick in phishing messages. Another person describes an administrator notification in their Gmail inbox, warning them of potential attempts by "certain groups and states" to access the account. "Then I went on Instagram or Facebook, back then, and realized everyone – my entire network of Tibetan activists worldwide – was posting about it. We must all have been targeted by a hacking attempt at the same time."

Uyghur Community

Fewer accounts exist regarding the Uyghur community. However, one individual reports that her computer became infected with suspicious viruses and had to be "completely reset." Meanwhile, the website of a politically prominent Uyghur was repeatedly attacked and blocked, and there were several hacking attempts – originating from locations in China – on that individual's Facebook account.

I. Soft Forms of Physical Violence

Media reports and interviews confirm isolated incidents of physical violence against members of the

Tibetan community in Switzerland. The cases cited involve relatively minor forms of violence and are backed by photo and video evidence⁷³ and a broad range of eyewitness accounts, as they generally occurred at well-attended public events. No instances of severe violence or killings are known in Switzerland. As for the Uyghur community, the research team received no reports of physical violence within Switzerland.

Tibetan Community

Most accounts of physical violence in the Tibetan community are linked to the 2014 Mid-Autumn Festival in Basel.⁷⁴ One respondent describes how employees of the Chinese Embassy physically intervened at this event, pushing some Tibetan protesters to the ground. "Things escalated, people were screaming, and some with children ran off, obviously scared. No one understood what was happening." Other incidents are also known from media sources.⁷⁵ For example, in 2008, a news crew from Swiss Television Romandy was prevented from filming when trying to record a segment in front of a wall at the Chinese Diplomatic Mission in Geneva that had been spray-painted with "Tibet – Chinese Murderers." A member of the crew was punched by one of the Mission's "guards" and threatened with a baton by another. Only a few hours after the team left the site, the wall had been cleaned.⁷⁶

J. Abuse of International Lists

Media reports indicate that politically prominent members of the Tibetan and Uyghur communities have been barred from attending UN events in Geneva or removed from the UN premises there. Based on the data available, it is not currently possible to determine whether Interpol red notices have been specifically used against members of these communities in Switzerland.

Tibetan Community

A media-reported case involves a Tibetan exile politician who was held for several hours at the entrance to the Palais des Nations in Geneva and prevented from attending a session of the UN Human Rights Council. According to NGO reports, the Chinese Mission in Geneva triggered the security check: "When a UN Member State requests a thorough investigation of an individual, the security services must conduct a thorough check and may even contact Interpol. That almost certainly happened in this case."⁷⁷

Uyghur Community

For the Uyghur community, one known incident dates back to 2007, when a Uyghur diaspora figure was stopped on UN premises in Geneva, escorted from the site, and handed over to the Swiss authorities. A similar occurrence took place in 2013, involving the same individual and again in Geneva.⁷⁸

4.3 Perceived Pressure by Actions of the Swiss Authorities

In addition to the forms of pressure exerted on Tibetan and Uyghur community members in Switzerland by the PRC or by actors attributable to it (as outlined above), respondents interviewed for this study also reported experiencing perceived pressure from Swiss authorities. This, they claim, leads to a certain degree of self-censorship and, ultimately, a restriction in exercising fundamental rights. Whether repression is actually taking place cannot be determined within the scope of this research report. Nevertheless, this perceived pressure will be briefly presented below. During the interviews, it became clear that among the Tibetan community in particular, an extremely pronounced and persistent sense of gratitude toward Switzerland as a host country often dampens the expression of criticism or lack of understanding vis-à-vis Swiss authorities. The criticism compiled here is of course based on subjective perceptions, and further

verification through media reports and additional research lies beyond the mandate of this report.

According to numerous Tibetan community members, they have the impression that their ability to hold peaceful demonstrations near the Chinese Embassy in Bern has been increasingly restricted.⁷⁹ A frequent point raised is the ever-growing distance between the officially approved protest area and the Chinese Embassy, cited as evidence that the right to demonstrate is increasingly curbed at the expense of the Tibetan community: "I've been protesting in Bern since the 1980s. The tightening of these restrictions has become really noticeable. In '87, we could still drive a Jeep with a megaphone right up to the Chinese Embassy gates. Then each year we were pushed further back. 100 meters. Eventually, we ended up somewhere near Helvetiaplatz, so far away that no one even sees us there. That says it all." "There was a tightening of rules so that suddenly we couldn't go [up to the Chinese Embassy] anymore. We had to stay at some distance – 80 or 100 meters from the building—and there's not much space in front of it. One can't help but wonder why this is happening. [...] Who's behind it? [...] The restrictions increased progressively. [...] That's just my personal perception." Another respondent explains, "[B]asically, the authorities tend to limit our rights to protest in subtle ways – for example, by specifying locations or times you can't use anymore or by capping the maximum number of participants. That didn't use to happen; it used to be unrestricted. You can sense we're being driven more and more out of the center, forced ever further away."

Over time, participants have also noted a growing police presence at Tibetan demonstrations: "You could really sense the change since the 1980s. Ten, fifteen, twenty years later, there would be a fully staffed, heavily equipped police unit, including water cannons and everything you can imagine, and that made it clear there was a certain sensitivity, a certain apprehension. [...] It felt like a tightening of the rules, more rigorous control by the Swiss security forces, who now seemed to view Tibetans as somewhat more dangerous than before. We really felt it then. Even though we always

protested peacefully and with the required permits, they were somehow afraid." Examples of shifting policies around protests include restricting a 1997 demonstration by the *Swiss-Tibetan Friendship Association* (GSTF) and the *Tibetan Community in Switzerland and Liechtenstein* (TCSL) against an exhibition on the Chinese Cultural Revolution in Wil (St. Gallen) to a fenced-in area. Further instances involve mandating certain zones in Bern for events such as the visits of Chinese Premier Li Keqiang in 2013 and Communist Party General Secretary and President Xi Jinping in 2017. Other cited examples include the substantial police presence during Premier Wen Jiabao's state visit in 2009 and police checks of protesters at demonstrations in Bern in 2017.⁸⁰

The perception of Switzerland's increasingly restrictive approach to approving demonstrations – seen here in the specific context of the Tibetan community – goes hand in hand with a sense of powerlessness and a diffuse kind of fear. According to respondents, this fear can, in some instances, deter future political engagement: "You feel like you're just getting smaller and smaller, and you have no influence—like the dough has already been rolled out. [...] I can only guess at this; nobody ever directly told me 'you can't do that.' [...] But maybe that's enough to make you think you'd rather not do it. [...] No, truly, it's not even about what's happening on the outside; it's about what's happening within. That's what's more devastating."

Respondents also noted that fewer municipalities appear to be participating in the GSTF's annual flag campaign commemorating the 1959 Tibetan uprising, and they suspect this might be due to pressure from China.⁸¹ Finally, they expressed disappointment with public remarks made by Swiss politicians, whom they feel show insufficient solidarity with Tibetan concerns. One respondent, for instance, voiced great frustration at the political response in the immediate aftermath of the physical violence perpetrated by Chinese Embassy personnel at the aforementioned Mid-Autumn Festival in Basel: "I was shouting, and others were shouting, and so on. People with their children even ran away in fear. Nobody understood what was happening. Then [he] got

on stage and said, 'We took you in all those years ago. And we would kindly ask you to respect this peaceful festival and that we want to be here in peace...' He must have said the word 'peace' three times, as though we were the ones being violent. [...] That was actually the worst part – far worse than the physical violence. Being belittled like that by someone so important was terrible."

Swiss security authorities have also been viewed critically at times. One person described their interaction with the Federal Intelligence Service (FIS) as one of the most "impactful moments" in terms of constraining their political activism: "One morning, someone from the FIS knocked on our door. [...] I met him later in a café, and he mostly wanted to talk about the Mid-Autumn Festival in Basel. I was involved in organizing that event. [...] He explained why I was singled out: 'Yes, well, as a young Tibetan, you stand out and are certainly of interest.' [...] He also very clearly told me that if we were to do anything political in China, we shouldn't expect Switzerland to help us." Another study, meanwhile, points to uncertainty about which policing body individuals at risk in Switzerland can turn to for assistance.⁸² In the same study, however, one respondent characterized the proactive response of the Swiss police positively. After a politically-active member of the community spoke in a newspaper interview about experiencing pressure from the PRC, the Lucerne Criminal Police contacted the individual, expressing interest in investigating the matter further. During the call, the contact person from the Lucerne Police reassured them: "Don't worry; we're on your side."⁸³ In addition, the existence of the "Parliamentary Group Tibet" in Switzerland has also been interpreted as a sign of support for the Tibetan community.⁸⁴

Several members of the Tibetan community report what they perceive to be a more restrictive asylum policy, often connected in their view to Chinese influence, and described as an additional form of pressure. Anxiety also arose when, in June 2015, the designation for the place of origin on residence permits for Tibetan community members in Switzerland changed from "Tibet" to "China (People's Republic)."⁸⁵

One respondent explains: "The result was that if Tibetans here had a B permit, [...] and they had to renew their residence, they needed proof of origin. Previously, it was enough to go to the Tibetan representative office in Geneva or to the Tibet Office (previously in Zurich) and get a certificate from them. Now they're saying that's no longer sufficient. [...] 'You have to go to the Chinese Embassy, because Tibet is part of China, and it now says China as place of origin, so you need to get the certificate there.' In my view, that is an act of arbitrary legal interference." The fact that this change has given the Chinese Embassy an opportunity to refuse this confirmation of origin, respondents claim, creates yet another lever of pressure on Tibetan community members.⁸⁶ Furthermore, some interviewees claim that the fact of the close temporal proximity between the conclusion of Switzerland's free trade agreement with China in 2013 (in force since July 1, 2014) and the change in designation of origin, the perception has spread in the Tibetan community that the change is due to increased Chinese influence on Switzerland. Some respondents also point to the SEM's LIINGUA language analyses⁸⁷ and allegations that asylum seekers who were rejected without identity documents were directed by the SEM to visit the Chinese Embassy "to obtain papers," further fueling this perception. Members of the Uyghur community likewise raised concerns, noting that they had to speak Chinese during asylum hearings because no Uyghur interpreters were available.

4.4 Perceived Pressure by Actions of the Tibetan Government-in-Exile and the TCSL

Within the Tibetan community, there are also cases in which pressure is exerted by the Tibetan Government-in-Exile and the TCSL. Three issues are mentioned in particular.

First, there exists a pressure within the community – loosely following a recommendation of the Dalai Lama – "to refrain from bi-cultural partnerships and marriages in order to preserve Tibetan ethnicity through 'Tibetan' marriage."⁸⁸ In one of the expert interviews, this commandment is seen on the one hand as a problem specific to exile communities such as the Tibetan (preservation of cultural identity), but also, on the other hand, as a restriction. Indeed, "in mixed marriages, language competence decreases even more," so "that's a bit of a problem." The preservation of the language is an issue of concern in the community and clearly appears as a "means of inclusion and exclusion."⁸⁹ In concrete terms, however, the expectations formulated and the pressure exerted by the Dalai Lama and the TCSL on this issue appear to be perceived very differently within the community itself.

Second, one interviewee recounts that members of the TGSL are expected to participate in pro-Tibetan demonstrations⁹⁰ and are even requested to pay some kind of fine if they fail to do so. "Yes, so monetary fines then are a kind of... the branches then say that those who come also have expenses, as they have to take a Friday off and so on; and those who do not join are therefore more or less obliged, which is decided, more or less, by the branches, not the TGSL as a whole; because the branches have a direct relationship to their members and they thus say, if you don't join, the least you can do is to leave something in the till, 20 francs or so." Once again, the concern seems to be that over time, the protest might dry up; on the other hand, the expectation of participation is perceived as a restriction and a political commandment.

Third, there is a longstanding controversy among the Tibetan community in Switzerland with regard to the

members of a religious denomination who worship the protective deity Shugden, which has been criticized by the Dalai Lama.⁹¹ According to the views of many members of the community, this conflict has been further amplified by a series of media reports by the "10 vor 10" program on Swiss national television.⁹² One interviewee recalls: "It was quite a strange situation. '10 vor 10,' which usually never produces a broadcast series [...], but they have done so with regard to Shugden. Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday... The Tibetan community was totally messed up [...]. The Dalai Lama was accused [...]. The Appeals Commission, I believe, eventually approved a complaint by the Tibetans. So things got fierce and hearty [...]. And that's when it erupted with the Shugden." The broader Tibetan community reacted to this controversy in different ways: One group followed the directive of the Dalai Lama with conviction, while another disapproved the "ban" but decided to continue complying with the Dalai Lama and his religious authority.⁹³ However, many of those who actively worship Shugden felt "severely impeded" in their religious freedom by the Tibetan exile government and marginalized by the Tibetan community in Switzerland as a whole.⁹⁴ This third group, though, seems to make up a much smaller proportion overall. According to one of the interviewees, this constraint is compared to a "semi-inquisition," as the "representatives of the people or the branch came to our homes to see if we have pictures or statues of this deity." At times, it is also assumed among community members that the controversy may be actively fueled by the Chinese government in order to cause a split in the Tibetan diaspora.⁹⁵ One of the persons interviewed for this research report points to the elections of the Tibetan Government-in-Exile in 2016 and 2021 as an example and argues that "worshippers of Shugden have been coopted with financial compensation to spread questionable content against Tibetans and the Tibetan administration; he also claims to have seen evidence that this compensation came "from the United Front." According to another respondent, it appears that the Shugden controversy has become less important today: "It has pretty much died down." The respondent attributes this to a Reuters Special Report⁹⁶ which highlighted the "connections to the PRC," which "reduced the momentum even further."

4.5 Exertions of Pressure by the PRC on Swiss Institutions of Higher Education and Swiss Authorities

This section focuses on the possible exertion of pressure by the PRC on Swiss educational institutions and authorities. It only addresses attempts at – or actual instances of – pressuring that directly involve individuals or issues related to Tibet or Xinjiang.

A. Swiss Institutions of Higher Education

Although the PRC is a major topic at Swiss institutions of higher education, and there are currently many efforts to address various associated challenges,⁹⁷ issues specifically concerning Tibet or Xinjiang play a notably smaller role. At Swiss universities, the number of instructors and researchers focusing on Tibet or Xinjiang is extremely limited: one interviewee referred to a "chronic undersupply" in their own institution. A systematic review of the past ten years of university course offerings in Switzerland revealed very few events dealing with subjects the PRC might find sensitive. There were almost no events on current political issues related to Tibet or Xinjiang. Unsurprisingly, then, the investigations in this area yielded hardly any usable information. In Geneva, two recent conferences on Xinjiang took place – one at a university-based Center for Asian Studies, and another at the Confucius Institute. At the former, two researchers asked not to be listed by name in the program, and decided against streaming their talks online. Apart from that, interviews suggested that there were no significant incidents.

Apart from that, there are only reports of harassment affecting members of the Tibetan community. One respondent described a Swiss-born Tibetan student with Swiss citizenship whose visa application for a research trip to the PRC was initially denied. Following protests by the Swiss educational institution and a subsequent conversation at the Chinese Embassy where a "Chinese person with knowledge of Tibet" was also present – the visa was finally granted, but specifically excluded the region where the fieldwork was to take

place. Another case is documented in the research literature: "When I studied at the University of Zurich and wanted to do a semester abroad in China, I was discriminated against compared to my classmates. Their processing time was four working days. For me it took two weeks. I was also required to do an interview with a Tibetan employee at the Chinese Consulate, simply because I'm Tibetan. During the interview, they wanted to know all my ties to Tibet and personal details about my parents. This Tibetan employee was someone who certainly had nothing to do with the Tibetan community."⁹⁸ This statement at least suggests that in everyday life, students from the Tibetan community in Switzerland may be facing similar issues to those documented in this research report.

B. Swiss Authorities

Unlike at educational institutions, the pressure experienced by authorities at the federal, cantonal, and municipal levels related to Tibet and Xinjiang typically comes from official representations of the PRC in Bern, Geneva, and Zurich. Protests and expressions of dissatisfaction, as well as requests and even undisguised threats – often delivered in a less-than-diplomatic manner – are commonplace. One member of a cantonal executive authority confirms that such pressure exists, yet emphasizes that these attempts are not heeded. The extent to which PRC pressure on Swiss authorities is ultimately successful remains unclear. Insofar as this report's limited inquiries and interviews could ascertain, local authorities appear less affected by such pressure than their national counterparts. One respondent from the executive branch of a large city recalled how the Chinese Consul General requested a meeting in response to the Dalai Lama's attendance at an interfaith event, where a member of the municipal government offered welcoming remarks: "She spent three-quarters of an hour telling me why I wasn't allowed to do this, and then... I spent about fifteen minutes explaining that it was a religious event and

that, even by diplomatic standards, there was absolutely no issue. After that, she basically spent another fifteen minutes, well, insulting me, and then we parted ways [...]. Let me just say, we've never let them tell us whom we can or cannot meet." Written and verbal complaints from the Consulate are frequent; once, the Consul General or the Ambassador even penned a letter to the city's entire executive, accusing the member engaged with Tibetan issues of "anti-Chinese propaganda." The respondent also observed that attitudes have shifted over time: "I must say, there's been significantly less interest in recent years in grappling with whether our partially sovereign canton [...] is allowed to host whomever it wishes, and whether it's up to a foreign embassy to tell us who can or cannot visit." Ultimately, the question of how the PRC may influence Swiss educational institutions and public authorities would require more extensive research than this report can provide.

4.6 Cross-Cutting Issues

In many of the forms of pressure described in the previous chapter, four cross-cutting issues can be identified to varying degrees: the involvement of family members in Tibet and Xinjiang as a means of exerting pressure (A), the complex forms and gradations of surveillance and espionage (B), fault lines within the communities (C), and a pervasive climate of fear (D). These cross-cutting issues intensify the observed forms of pressure, illustrating how they interconnect and thereby shape a broader, overarching phenomenon. These cross-cutting issues are by no means specific to Switzerland, but are also evident in other countries where members of the Tibetan and Uyghur communities are being pressured. These cross-cutting issues are essential for a comprehensive understanding of the situation of the Tibetan and Uyghur communities in Switzerland.

A. Family in Tibet and Xinjiang as a Means of Pressure

An important cross-cutting issue regarding the phenomenon of pressure exertion on Tibetans and Uyghurs in Switzerland is the connection between actions in Switzerland and their potential consequences for relatives in Tibet or Xinjiang. Through these relatives on the ground, Chinese authorities have leverage to put pressure on the Tibetan and Uyghur communities in Switzerland – with various intentions: to compel Tibetans and Uyghurs living in Switzerland to return, to co-opt them, or to deter them from participating in political activities. If individuals in Switzerland do not comply, their family in Xinjiang or Tibet is punished. Co-optation also works partly through putting pressure on family members, as Tibetans or Uyghurs residing in Switzerland decide to cooperate with Chinese authorities out of concern for their relatives. Relatives in Tibet and Xinjiang are thus held in quasi-collective punishment for the activities and actions of Tibetans and Uyghurs in Switzerland. Once someone no longer has relatives in those regions, this lever of influence disappears.

Actions in Switzerland can sometimes have serious consequences for relatives in Tibet/Xinjiang: Respondents report that family members were arrested after they participated in a demonstration in Switzerland. The authorities reportedly said: "Your family [abroad] has not cooperated with the government. They are carrying out actions against the government, separatist and terrorist ones." Some respondents describe how their relatives in China lost their jobs after a person in Switzerland became politically active or applied for asylum. Even just the use of forbidden words during phone calls can land relatives in a Chinese prison. As a result, those who are still allowed contact with relatives in their homeland can only talk about trivial matters.

For Tibetans and Uyghurs in Switzerland, this leads to an ambivalent situation: In Switzerland, they feel relatively safe and comfortable. Even in relation to their relatives in Tibet and Xinjiang, they often perceive their own living conditions as privileged. Nevertheless, due

to fears for their relatives in their homeland, they are never completely free, even in Switzerland. Many indicate that they restrict their political activism. Many also refrain from public appearances or from giving named interviews to newspapers on sensitive political topics related to China. Others completely abstain from communication with their relatives to protect them from possible consequences of their own actions. The Tibetan and Uyghur communities in Switzerland are aware that the Swiss state cannot protect them from this threat: "The thing is: I have relatives there – the Swiss police can't protect you from that."

B. Gray Areas of Espionage/Surveillance (Snitching)

The present research report does not have the function or aim to identify criminally-relevant actions or to draw conclusions in this regard. Nevertheless, the various forms of repression outlined here may raise issues of criminal liability in certain instances. Insofar as the hypotheses examined in Chapter 4.2 point to actions attributable to the PRC, the CCP, its authorities and officials, or individuals or organizations associated with or co-opted by the Party-State, the key question is when such activities – carried out on behalf of a foreign state – might become unlawful under criminal law (cf. Swiss Criminal Code, Arts. 271–274).

It can be assumed that espionage also has relevance for the situation of Tibetans and Uyghurs in Switzerland – given that these two groups rank among the "five poisons" to be suppressed, that "stability" in Tibet and Xinjiang is a declared core interest of the Chinese Party-State, and in light of the size and significance of the Tibetan community in Switzerland, in particular. Determining whether and how espionage is actually taking place, however, was not among this report's objectives. Alongside numerous indications produced by the research process, there is also a widespread, often nebulous sense within the Tibetan and Uyghur communities that espionage is occurring. Almost all interviewees stated that some level of spying is taking place. Suspicions were not merely expressed in general terms; it was not uncommon for cousins to accuse one another, or even a mother to accuse her son, and so forth. This breeds a general atmosphere of mistrust

and, in some cases, contributes to a climate of fear.

Through the interviews, expert discussions, initiator analysis, and independent research conducted for this report, a broad spectrum has emerged. It ranges from intelligence-led espionage, to lower-level spying as a semi-official activity, and to informants who do not actively seek information. At the same time, however, there is very little concrete knowledge about the instigators of these activities, the modalities, or the specific details of the processes involved. Interviewees often spoke only vaguely of the Chinese police, state security, or simply "the authorities." A dominant perspective within the communities appears to operate on a friend-or-foe paradigm: on one side stands the Chinese Party-State; on the other, the respective exile community. Anyone who allows themselves to be co-opted by the Chinese Party-State is perceived as having definitively switched sides. There is little room for ambivalence or for the possibility that individual actors on both sides might simultaneously pursue multiple agendas. Yet in a few instances, the research uncovered strong indications of precisely such ambivalences.

In this area, the non-ethnic definition of "Tibetan and Uyghur communities" established at the outset proves useful, as a narrowly-focused ethnic approach would obscure the possibility that non-Tibetan Swiss citizens or members of other nationalities could be involved in recruiting informants or acting as informants themselves. The motivation in these cases appears to be largely free from negative pressure, especially when there are no family ties to Tibet or Xinjiang. The research has also found strong evidence for the existence of such configurations in Switzerland.

Finally, when it comes to the Tibetan and Uyghur communities in Switzerland, it is crucial to develop as precise an understanding as possible of the variations in and nuances surrounding spying and espionage described above. Without such clarity, valuable opportunities for action may be overlooked, while divisions and polarization within these communities may be unnecessarily exacerbated.

C. Fault Lines within the Exile Communities

A further factor affecting every form of pressure is the existence of internal divisions within the Tibetan and Uyghur communities in Switzerland. During interviews, in addition to describing the repression they experienced and the infringements on their fundamental rights by state actors, members of these communities often voiced implicit and, at times, explicit criticisms of other associations or groups within their own diaspora communities. For instance, among Uyghurs, supporters of the Justice for Uyghurs Association criticized the Uyghur Association Switzerland for advocating not full independence for East Turkestan but "merely" greater autonomy from the PRC. This stance was partly attributed to the latter's ties with the Munich-based World Uyghur Congress (WUC), which takes a similar position regarding autonomy for East Turkestan. According to one interviewee, the "weak" position of seeking autonomy rather than independence stems from a concern that pursuing full independence would jeopardize US financial support.

Similar debates over autonomy (the "Middle Way" proposed by the Dalai Lama) versus independence have long been omnipresent in the Tibetan exile community.⁹⁹ More recently, representation in the exile parliament has become an increasingly contentious issue. The most recent flashpoint was a leadership dispute within the Tibetan Government-in-Exile that began in 2021. According to respondents, this conflict not only reveals internal fault lines within the Tibetan community in Switzerland – stemming from generational differences and distinct regional origins in Tibet – but also highlights overlapping influences from the PRC, the perceived tightening of Swiss asylum policy, and processes of co-optation.

A Swiss-Tibetan respondent explains in an interview that a "depoliticization" has taken place within both the Tibetan community in Switzerland and in broader exile politics: "Between 2010 and 2014, the wave of self-immolations began. That was an immense moment of

frustration. We realized that people in Tibet were still extremely committed and that the situation was growing more difficult. We tried to generate some kind of international reaction, but it fell far short – it didn't match the magnitude of these drastic actions and the loss of so many lives. People were disillusioned. [...] As a result, many in my generation pulled back, distanced themselves, because they noticed that the foundation we had then was simply no longer there. [...]

Organizations like the *Tibetan Youth Association in Europe* had substance, a clear agenda, and real political agency. Then it all seemed to drift away. There was a lack of leadership. After that came the internal power struggles, and these two factors fueled each other."

Several respondents also voiced their surprise that members of the Tibetan community from the third migration wave to Switzerland – who had never before shown much involvement in Tibetan associations, presumably due to their precarious residence status, economic difficulties, and different socialization – are now suddenly engaging in conflicts over political representation within the exile government. According to these respondents, such individuals have fueled disputes, especially regarding the representation of different home regions in Tibet, even within Switzerland. One person has reportedly done so by sending threatening messages on platforms such as WhatsApp, WeChat, and Telegram, and by sharing incendiary YouTube videos: "He once filmed himself with knives and posted it in the chat, making threats right here in Switzerland. He shared images of bullets and guns. That was always in the group chat. [Name of individual] once filmed himself with a knife and posted the footage to the group. They dare to do that in Switzerland. Another person said in the group, 'I want to kill [this person].' They did that sort of thing often. People are scared to speak out against them, worried they might be in danger."

According to respondents, it is striking that precisely those individuals whose positions divide the community often receive a visa from the Chinese Embassy shortly thereafter, enabling them to visit their families in Tibet. This appears to indicate the

involvement of PRC actors, though it also comes with complexities: "These are genuinely passionate people with strong emotions, who were simply outraged and wanted to show solidarity. The question is, who is behind it? [...] Because they are also people who could easily be instrumentalized or influenced. For this reason, I suspect that there are individuals behind them who are getting direct support from the Chinese Embassy, given that Dharamsala has been a thorn in the side of the Chinese government for decades. Stabilizing this region has been China's top priority for years." This suspicion is further reinforced, say respondents, by the fact that members of a certain Tibetan "family clan" living in Switzerland – who are repeatedly linked to co-optation activities and who otherwise did not engage in political issues within Tibetan associations – played a significant role in stoking these internal conflicts. Multiple respondents reported that, under suspicion of co-optation, these individuals threatened and, in some cases, even physically attacked others who advocated for Tibetan causes and for political unity within the Tibetan community.

Respondents are unable to provide solid evidence that these individuals have been co-opted by the PRC. Nevertheless, they point out that the actions of those suspected of co-optation have very real effects on members of the Tibetan community in Switzerland: "If you want to do something for Tibet here, you do it at the risk of your life. They don't say they work for China, but they claim this or that is wrong. As a result, doing [Tibet-related] work here has become a life-threatening undertaking for us."

D. Climate of Fear

As mentioned earlier, this research report also addresses effects that only become severe enough through repetition or the combination of events that may individually seem "harmless." A secondary effect arising from many of the primary forms of pressure examined in Chapter 4.2 is the creation of a climate of fear. Typically, this does not manifest as a pervasive, uninterrupted anxiety – although one respondent did say they are "always afraid" – but rather as a series of

situations and experiences that occur regularly. Some respondents, for example, describe how awareness of possible co-optation can suddenly make them wonder whether a person they encounter might be working for the other side. Others recount experiences in their professional lives or at public events where their membership of the Tibetan or Uyghur community supposedly had negative consequences. Almost all fear they are being monitored digitally. This climate of fear is further reinforced by anecdotes from others in the community as well as media reports on individual cases in Switzerland and elsewhere. As a result of this diffuse anxiety, members of the Tibetan and Uyghur communities refrain from certain actions more readily than others in Switzerland, due to concern over potential repercussions. Several respondents say they forgo even attempting to apply for a Chinese visa because they "heard stories" of it not working out for others – or fear that applying might cause harm to their relatives in China.

Several respondents expressed a particular concern that harm might befall their relatives back home if they become politically active here, or that they may lose the ability to visit them if political engagement results in the denial of a Chinese visa. This anxiety can extend so far that some people avoid politically-active community members: "Many of my relatives know that I am politically engaged, and because of this, they keep their distance out of fear of negative consequences. I'll be fine as long as my loved ones remain unharmed." Some respondents also mentioned that only those who have already "lost their family" are able to speak openly. When asked if visiting the Chinese diplomatic mission felt uneasy, one respondent said, "Not uneasy – I was 100% afraid." Such a climate of fear is highly relevant in the context of exercising fundamental rights. The Federal Supreme Court of Switzerland recognizes that a so-called chilling effect can be enough to deter people from exercising a fundamental right. It has noted that "[t]he exercise of fundamental rights must not be restricted by negative side effects to such an extent that it amounts to a deterrent or an intimidation effect."¹⁰⁰

Following this principle, a state's duty to protect can be invoked when there is a serious threat to the individual, creating a deterrent effect – even if the threat has not yet materialized.¹⁰¹ This is evident in the accounts of both Tibetan and Uyghur respondents, who describe feelings of fear in private and public settings that sometimes prevent them from becoming politically active.

Members of the Tibetan and Uyghur communities respond to these circumstances in a variety of ways. Some are afraid and therefore avoid potentially risky activities, while others remain politically active despite considerable anxiety. Others say they have no fear at all. However, an absence of fear does not necessarily imply feeling secure: some who report having no fear have "let go of it" out of desperation, believing they have nothing left to lose. Another outcome of this pervasive fear is increased mistrust within the communities. Certain individuals – suspected of wrongdoing for any number of reasons – may be shunned or even ostracized. In some cases, this can lead to adverse health effects; one respondent, for example, stated that they were taking medication to cope with their anxiety.

Ultimately, one respondent fears that the PRC may be deliberately cultivating this climate of fear. Anxiety, they explain, can "lead to passivity or silence," reducing political engagement and causing people to withdraw. "Distrust within the community also increases [...]. I believe this to be a Chinese strategy."¹⁰²

5. Conclusions

This research report shows that many of the theoretically conceivable forms of pressure attributed to PRC actors – identified through a global case analysis – also take place in Switzerland, albeit to varying degrees of intensity. Based on the total number of reported incidents and a triangulation of multiple forms of evidence, it can be stated with a high degree of probability that Tibetan and Uyghur community members in Switzerland are systematically monitored, threatened, and co-opted by PRC actors. Some individuals are also subjected to milder forms of coercion intended to force their return to Chinese territory. Instances of refugee espionage likewise occur in Switzerland. Within the Tibetan community in particular, cases of mild physical violence have been recorded at political demonstrations and public events, carried out by members of official Chinese representations. Additionally, those representations often use the issuing of visas for travel to Tibet as a potent incentive and highly effective means of pressure.

Overall, it appears that the scope and intensity of the identified forms of pressure are more likely underreported than overreported in this research report. On the one hand, the initiators behind these processes often remain hidden, and targets may fear reprisals if they speak about their experiences. On the other hand, particularly with regard to the sizable Tibetan community in Switzerland, it is plausible to assume that forms of pressure known to exist in countries with far smaller communities (such as Sweden) are very likely also to occur in Switzerland. Consequently, the situation of the Tibetan and Uyghur communities in Switzerland is significantly shaped by the PRC, and the exertion of pressure has a notable impact on their ability to exercise fundamental rights.

These findings indicate that not only individual actions but also mere membership in the Tibetan or Uyghur community can influence how PRC actors exert pressure. It thus appears that attempts at repression are carried out systematically and potentially affect all members of these diaspora communities. At the same time, certain overlapping factors can render Tibetan and Uyghur community members particularly

vulnerable to such pressure, including political activism, precarious residence status in Switzerland, or close relatives remaining in Tibet or Xinjiang.

With regard to the actions of Swiss authorities, a perceived tightening of restrictions on peaceful demonstrations and a stricter asylum policy are described as additional forms of pressure – an impression primarily voiced by members of the Tibetan community. A critical factor is that the sense of security among community members is strongly influenced by these perceived developments, in combination with what they see as a shift in federal priorities towards maintaining economic relations with the PRC. Furthermore, actions by the Tibetan Government-in-Exile and the TCSL are perceived by some within the Tibetan community as exerting pressure – though usually by specific individuals and groups. A more in-depth investigation would be required to determine the extent to which the PRC is influencing or exacerbating these situations.

These various research findings are reinforced by the identification of cross-cutting issues that shed additional light on the processes in question. Topics such as the use of families in Tibet and Xinjiang as leverage, the range of forms and degrees of espionage, critical fault lines within the exile communities, and a recurring climate of fear stemming from repeated experiences all place the discrete pressure tactics outlined in the hypotheses into a broader context, thereby highlighting the systematic nature of this repression.

Viewed in isolation, some of the identified restrictions might seem potentially insignificant. However, examining them cumulatively and over time reveals a significant impact spanning many areas of life for Tibetans and Uyghurs in Switzerland (family ties, communication, travel, mobility and residency rights, physical and mental wellbeing, data privacy, cyberspace, political rights, etc.). From the perspective of a member of the Tibetan or Uyghur community, these are never isolated incidents but rather a phenomenon that can recur frequently and in multiple realms of daily life.

Indeed, the pressure need not even manifest tangibly to exert its effects. Awareness of these practices – and the uncertainty over how one might escape them –leaves deep imprints on the everyday lives of those affected. Recognizing these complex and challenging circumstances is essential in order to develop effective solutions and protective measures.

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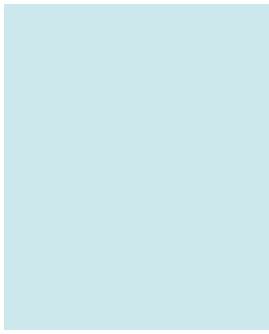
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