

Motion of support for researcher colleagues facing sanctions from Beijing

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ULB would like to express its strong and unwavering support for academics and researchers who use their academic freedom with rigour and professionalism to express themselves on subjects of major importance, and who thus contribute to a better knowledge of China in the world and particularly in Europe.

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On 22 March 2021, the European Union announced sanctions against four Chinese officials responsible for the design and implementation of mass internment campaigns and the security apparatus in the Uighur region.

These repressive policies also affect the whole of Uighur academia, as ULB emphasised in its [motion of support for our Uighur colleagues](#) in November 2018. The high-ranking government officials sanctioned by the European Union are accused of serious human rights abuses, based on the extensive evidence accumulated over the past three years by researchers and journalists working on the Uighur issue. This is the first time since the events of Tiananmen in 1989 that the European Union has taken such measures regarding the People's Republic of China. This is also a coordinated action involving the United States, Canada and Great Britain, whose governments have similarly condemned Chinese policy in the Uighur region.

In response, Beijing named ten European nationals, including Belgian parliamentarian Samuel Cogolati, as well as nine individuals and four entities from Britain, and imposed similar sanctions upon them for "maliciously spreading lies and disinformation". The nineteen individuals are banned from entering China, Hong Kong and Macao, as are their immediate family members. Among them are two researchers whose work has been crucial to our knowledge and understanding of the Uighur crisis: German researcher [Adrian Zenz](#) (currently based in the United States at the Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation) and researcher [Joanne](#)

Smith-Finley [↗](#), a Reader at Newcastle University who specialises in the Uighur region and has been responsible for coordinating relations with her university's Chinese partners for over two decades. Beijing's sanctions also apply to a third researcher, **Björn Jerdén** [↗](#), Head of the China Centre at the Swedish Institute of International Affairs, and the independent European think tank **MERICs** [↗](#) (Mercator Institute for China Studies), based in Berlin, which involves some 30 experts.

This escalation of sanctions by Beijing is accompanied by attempts to intimidate and insult European researchers who express themselves freely and in contradiction with current Chinese policies, particularly in Hong Kong and on the topics of the Uighurs or Taiwan. Thus, in recent days, **Antoine Bondaz** [↗](#), a Lecturer at Science Po Paris and Research Fellow at the Foundation for Strategic Research, specialising in North-East Asia, has been publicly called a "little thug" on the Twitter page of the Chinese embassy in Paris, then a "mad hyena" and a "villain" in an official press release from that same embassy.

ULB would like to express its strong and unwavering support for academics and researchers who use their academic freedom with rigour and professionalism to express themselves on subjects of major importance, and who thus contribute to a better knowledge of China in the world and particularly in Europe. Campaigns to undermine the credibility of their research and deny them access to Chinese territory and their collaborators there are serious impediments to their academic freedom. This situation is also a reprehensible breach of the terms set out by UNESCO in its *Recommendation concerning the Status of Higher Education Teaching Personnel* of 1997, which calls on all UN members (including China) to protect the freedom of thought, expression and movement of teaching personnel and in particular their right to freely disseminate their research findings.

As a result, the sanctions issued by Beijing are becoming a major concern for the entire international academic community. **ULB is therefore calling on universities in Belgium and Europe to show their solidarity by denouncing the sanctions imposed on our colleagues.**

https://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2021/03/22/ouigours-l-union-europeenne-prend-des-sanctions-contre-la-chine-qui-replique_6074063_3210.html [↗](#)

https://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2021/03/19/petite-frappe-quand-l-ambassade-de-chine-a-paris-s-en-prend-a-un-chercheur-francais_6073780_3210.html [↗](#)

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