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# The Influence of Non-Governmental Organizations on Agenda-Setting in the European Union

A case study on the advocacy of the World Uyghur  
Congress

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I am glad to say this thesis is finally finished, as far as any academic work can ever be truly finished.



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# 1 – INTRODUCTION

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*This introductory chapter will present the general puzzle which engendered this research followed by the specific research question and the goals of this study. The chapter aims to create a general guideline to the study and to fit the research within a broader context of research on non-governmental organisations advocacy and on the agenda setting in international organisations.*

## 1.1 TRANSNATIONAL HUMAN-RIGHTS ADVOCACY AND THE AGENDA OF INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS

To raise awareness of an issue related to the oppression of a group of people or the breaches of their rights, and to achieve change, scholars have identified several strategies leading to success. In a lot of cases, authors will point to the importance of transnational advocacy networks. Keck and Sikkink (1999) define these networks as being “*motivated by values rather than by material concerns of professional norms*” (p.89) and Buntinx & Colli (2021) argue that transnational NGOs act as moral entrepreneurs in the policy-making process of international organisations. These advocacy networks therefore tend to form around ethical issues such as physical harm or inequality and often find their strength in numbers. The reason these networks exist is because national NGOs may encounter blockages from within their own countries and therefore external pressure and external connections will help lower barriers and transactional costs in order to generate change. This is why a lot of NGOs exist altogether: to achieve change in areas where states refuse to cooperate and to do the work states refuse to do. They try and mostly succeed to be the representatives of civil society. By having external NGOs fighting for a cause and the rights of oppressed

communities, these communities' issues reach higher global awareness. However, NGOs do not hold political or legislative power and often also do not hold much financial power, and in a lot of cases, despite a transnational advocacy network composed of civil society, change does not come about. This is why NGOs try to reach the agenda of international organisations such as the UN, NATO, ASEAN or the European Union and have become part of the transnational advocacy network. The first step to introducing an international organization into a transnational advocacy network is reaching their agenda. Among transnational advocacy, well established NGOs tend to be the most organized and resourceful while also having the most connections to governmental actors and decision-makers. Human rights NGOs' main roles are, according to Wiseberg (1989) to inform and monitor, to influence legislation, to implement the legislation by stopping abuses, securing redress or providing humanitarian assistance, educate and raise consciousness, be solidary, deliver services and keep the political system open. Therefore, if communities and civil society wish to reach the agenda of any international organization, NGOs are likely to turn into leaders of the process, holding the most expertise in advocacy and having the most resources.

## 1.2 THE EUROPEAN UNION AS A GLOBAL ADVOCATE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

The European Union (EU) defines itself as a huge advocate for human rights around the world. In the EU, human rights are regulated with the help of the EU Charter of fundamental rights and the European Court of Justice. The organization states that *"The European Union is based on a strong commitment to promoting and protecting human rights, democracy and the rule of law worldwide."* (Europa.eu). Since 1992, the EU has included in all its agreements with third countries a clause defining respect for human rights and democracy as 'essential elements' in the EU's relationship. This approach has been further developed in the Cotonou agreement signed with African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries in June 2000 which is based on respect for human rights, democratic principles, the rule of law and good governance. In this case, the respect

for human rights was an essential condition for preferential trade tariffs. It constituted a major step in the development of the European Union's human rights policies and led to the EU's regular strategy of cooperation that consists of the respect of human rights in exchange for some benefits.

Since then, throughout the years, the EU has adopted multiple binding and non-binding strategies of human rights promotion. In 2020 for example, the EU re-affirmed its commitment to the defence of human rights and adopted conclusions on EU priorities at United Nations Human Rights Fora. These conclusions stated that the EU would pursue its commitment to the opposition to the death penalty and torture, the promotion of accountability, international humanitarian law, fundamental freedoms, non-discrimination, rights of children, as well as the maintenance of its support for human rights defenders worldwide (European Council, 2020). In relation to the supposed openness of the EU, multiple studies have been done on agenda-setting in the EU by NGOs, however most of these focus on the rights and the issues within the European Union and not so much on the rights of those external to the EU (Thiel & Uçarer 2014).

### 1.3 CHINA-EU RELATIONS AND THE UYGHURS

An interesting case testing the real dedication to the promotion of Human Rights of the EU over the past few years has been that of China. The 2020 EU-China Relations report of the European Union External Service Action (EUESA) explains that for the EU, *"China is simultaneously a cooperation partner, a negotiation partner, an economic competitor and a systemic rival"* (p.1). In other words, China is one of the main actors in the EU's current economic framework. The EUESA further specifies that the EU *"pursues realistic, effective and coherent engagement with China, based on their values and interests"* (p.1). The report also puts forward that the EU consistently speaks out about the deteriorating human rights situation in China (Xinjiang and Tibet in particular) and the treatment of human rights lawyers and defenders.



Since 1978, the Chinese Communist Party has been systematically promoting *Mandarin Chinese* in the Xinjiang region and the instruction in Uyghur has been largely reduced in most of the schools, if not all schools, of the region (Imtyaz, 2020). In May 2014, then-Xinjiang Party Secretary Zhang Chunxian revived the “Strike Hard” strategy and inaugurated the “People’s War on Terror” in the region (Millward & Peterson 2020). Since 2016, the Xinjian region and its Uyghur community have been subject to an intensified regime of technologically-driven mass surveillance, internment, indoctrination, family separation, birth suppression, and forced labour (Millward & Peterson 2020) of which both national and international corporations have been profiting. As of 2019, it was estimated that Chinese authorities had detained up to 1.5 million people, mostly Uyghurs but also Kazakhs, Kyrgyz and other ethnic Turkic Muslims, Christians as well as some foreign citizens, in secretive internment camps which are located throughout the region (Reuters, 2019). In the past few years, the global community and international organisations have become more aware of the situation and more outspoken. The Uyghur diaspora is very active in its advocacy worldwide, with as its biggest organisation the World Uyghur Congress (Chen 2014).

In 2020, the US removed the East Turkestan Islamic Movement from its terrorist organisation list as a change of foreign policy strategy (Spengemann & Fonseca 2021). The Uyghur human rights crisis therefore exists in a context of political tensions between major global powers. In June 2020, 50 UN Special Procedures mandate holders jointly raised the alarm about Xinjiang and called on the Government of the People’s Republic of China to respect human rights in Xinjiang and elsewhere in China. In October 2020, a cross regional group of 39 countries expressed grave concern about the existence of a large network of “political re-education” camps in Xinjiang. They spoke of severe restrictions on the freedoms of religion or belief, movement, association and expression (International Service on Human Rights, 2021). They also voiced grave concern about widespread surveillance, disproportionately targeting Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslim minorities, and about state-sponsored forced labour, sexual violence and forced birth control, including sterilisation. In December 2021, an independent tribunal Uyghur Tribunal found China guilty of genocide and crimes against humanity. The European Union had been notoriously

vigilant on taking any definite positions, however it first started sanctioning several Chinese leaders in 2020 and has become more vocal in 2021.

## 1.4 RESEARCH QUESTION AND GOALS

Considering the active role of the WUC in Uyghur advocacy and the complicated situation of the European Union in regards to its relations with China, as well as the general inquisition on NGO influence, this study sets out to answer the following question: *how does the World Uyghur Congress influence the agenda-setting of the European Union?*

Studying the World Uyghur Congress in relation to the European Union is relevant on multiple fronts. First of all, on the societal level, the NGO finds itself defending the rights of a Muslim minority in China while the western world that has seen a rise of islamophobia over the years. The crisis also takes place in a world where US is in a tense trade and diplomatic rivalry with China. In between that rivalry, the EU has a difficult time positioning itself and therefore raising awareness for the Uyghur issue in Europe is crucial. Finding out how the World Uyghur Congress, main representative NGO of the Uyghur diaspora, attempts to reach the agenda of the EU is thence particularly pertinent today.

Secondly, this paper is of academic relevance as it aims to contribute to the literature on strategies employed by NGOs to influence the agenda of international organisations in general and that of the EU in particular. It brings together literature on general agenda-setting, international organisations' agenda-setting by NGOs and EU agenda-setting by NGOs to form one cohesive framework. This will in turn enable a better understanding of the role and power of human right NGO's advocacy for those external to the EU, and how those NGOs can eventually achieve or participate in the achievement of human rights policy change. Moreover, the theoretical framework can be used in research on other NGOs strategies to improve their agenda-setting influence.

Put shortly, the study aims to:

- Put together existing theories and research on agenda-setting in a cohesive framework that can be used for successful agenda-setting by NGOs advocating for external human rights at international organisations and in the EU in particular.
- Assess the reality of an NGO advocating for external human rights at the European Union and find the strengths and weaknesses in the WUCs strategy.

The main goal will therefore be theory application, but incidentally, by studying the reality of an NGO, possible variables that do strengthen the WUCs strategy may appear and that will result in theory testing. The potential successful application of existing theory to explain an individual case and guide future effective social interventions *“can be seen as the ultimate success of the scientific process”* according to Toshkov (2016: 41).

In order to answer the question, this research will take a qualitative approach to assess how, in accordance or discordance to theory, the WUC aims to reach the agenda. The study will proceed as follows. First, there will be an elaboration on theory on NGO agenda-setting, then more specifically on NGO agenda-setting within the EU context, in order to finally have a full analysis relying on an interview and research around the World Uyghur Congress' advocacy. This paper should give a clearer understanding of the WUC and its strategy before eventually pointing out its strong points and in which regards the strategy can still be improved. By doing so, other non-profits that seek the right to self-determination for their people, external to the EU, for example the Kurdish National Congress, or organisations that find themselves in a controversial context such as the National Iranian Congress or the Palestinian NGO Network (PNGO) can take note and enhance their strategies for the better too.

## 2 – THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

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*In order to understand how an NGO can influence agenda-setting in the EU, it is necessary to build a theoretical framework, inspired by previous literature and theories, that can help explain and analyse a specific case. In this study, our main focus is access and opportunities to agenda-setting by an NGO. Hence, this chapter will look at what strategies an NGO should theoretically install if it wants successful access to the agenda of international organisations and the EU in particular. Therefore, firstly, the general theory of agenda-setting will be elaborated upon. Subsequently, this study will look at previous research on NGO specific agenda-setting and elaborate on the power of framing, political opportunities and mobilizational structures. The chapter will conclude with EU specific NGO advocacy literature which will be incorporated with the rest in an operationalisation table.*

### 2.1 AGENDA-SETTING THEORY

#### 2.1.2 THE DEFINITION OF AGENDA-SETTING

Before getting in the depth of the agenda-setting process, the concept itself needs to be defined. Over the years, scholars have divided the agenda into two types: the systemic agenda and the formal or institutional agenda (Cobb and Elder 1972: 85-86), this distinction has been maintained throughout the years (Jones and Baumgartner 2004; Bernt et al. 2014, Bevan et al. 2019). The systemic agenda includes “*all issues that are commonly perceived by members of the political community as meriting public attention and as involving matters within the legitimate jurisdiction of existing governmental authority*” (Cobb and Elder 1972: 85). This means that an issue must be framed, which in turn means that a strategy has to be set up and awareness around the issue must be raised. The formal or institutional agenda on the other hand is a “*set of items explicitly up for*

*the active and serious consideration of authoritative decision-makers*” (Cobb and Elder, 1972: 86). Indeed, once an issue comes to the attention of those holding decisional powers, the executive, legislature and the judiciary, there is a possibility of policy change (Jones and Baumgartner, 2004:2; Bevan et al. 2019). For this study, both definitions will be considered as they can be seen as part of a complementary process: the first step is the systemic agenda and the second step is the formal agenda. Eventually agenda-setting has taken place once the specific institution has recognised the issue (Cashore & Howlett 2020).

### 2.1.2 THE PROCESS TO ACHIEVE AGENDA-SETTING

According to both Kingdon (1984, 2002: 331) and later Howlett (2009), in order for an issue to reach the agenda – in their case the agenda of a government – three streams need to meet. This is a theory that most scholars agree with and that is frequently used in agenda-setting analysis (Howlett et al. 2009). Therefore, at the agenda-setting stage, all policy actors have the possibility to have an impact – meaning that the whole policy universe is still included in the policy process (Cashore & Howlett 2020). Kingdon’s three streams are the politics, policies and problems streams, who have to encounter a political window. This is the first step to understand the agenda-setting process. The problem stream refers to the perception of problems as public issues that require government action. The policy stream consists of experts and analysts examining problems and proposing solutions to them. The political stream is composed of factors such as swings of national moods, administrative and legislative turnover and interest groups pressure campaigns. Once the actors and specific streams have been defined in a particular case, one can start assessing a more specific question.

These streams will come together in so called “policy windows” which are often triggered by external circumstances. Policy windows can be defined as “*unpredictable openings in the policy process that create the possibility for influence over the direction and outcome of that process.*” (Pal 2014: 125), and according to Howlett and Ramesh (1998: 495) all actors, whether they are governmental or not, act accordingly to assumptions they make about the factors and variables that drive agenda-setting.

However, the existence of external circumstances with the ability to trigger policy windows does not mean that an issue will actually reach the decision-makers' agenda. For example, a school shooting might occur and make the front pages of all media, yet this does not mean measures to prevent school shootings from happening will come on the institutional agenda of the government. Consequently, scholars came up with four types of windows of opportunity: routinized political, discretionary political, spill-over problem and random problem windows (Howlett & Ramesh 1998). A routinized political window means that institutionalized procedural events trigger a window opening, elections for example. A discretionary political window means that the behaviour of certain political actors will lead to a less predictable window opening, for example the resignation of the Santer Commission in 1999. A spill-over problem window will occur when issues that are related to a subject that is already on the agenda, will be drawn to an already open window, for example the issue of gun control with the issue of school safety. Lastly, the random problem window will open if random events or unpredictable crises open unpredictable windows. In this case, there will be the rare occurrence of a focussing event, which could be a scandal revealing a possibility of greater damage in the future in a particular area, that is known to both policy makers and the public simultaneously. Actors wishing to reach a certain agenda need to be ready when windows of opportunity open, and show entrepreneurship, a factor that will come back in this studies' framework later. Indeed, as explained by Downs (1972) attached to the window of opportunity, there is an issue attention cycle, which means that in the moment of the focusing event, all streams need to be ready in order to achieve change and have an impact on the agenda. This is due to the fact that maintaining the momentum of such an event has often proved to be difficult.

Kingdon's theory has been applied to multiple cases (Sharp 1994, Woods & Peake 1988) because it helps capture the idea of the "ripeness" of an idea, and is still the foundation of a lot of empirical research today. But theories of agenda setting have evolved and developed. Indeed, there has been a lot of criticism stating that the theory relied a lot on "chance" and put too much emphasis on the importance of problem construction (Béland & Howlett 2016) – which falls under the category of framing that

will be discussed further in this theoretical framework – despite the fact that that “problem” may later be reframed or abandoned in the long-term (Colebatch 2006, Jann & Wegrich 2007, Howlett et al 2014)

If in the past and according to Kingdon, agenda-setting included a fixed set of actors, today actors have multiplied and the study of agenda-setting has proved to be much more complex than it once was. While Kingdon’s theory still stands, the reality is less linear and the streams are often intertwined. Moreover, over the past few years an already existent but today more prevalent actor has started playing a major role in agenda-setting: the media. It is often considered to be part of the public agenda, and thus heavily changeable and only giving opportunities for “random political windows”. However, that would be oversimplifying the role of the media as a tool for the people, while in itself, the media holds a lot of power. Another set of actors that are also partaking more and more in agenda-setting are NGOs. NGOs are often considered to be a leading voice within civil society and thus indirectly or directly of certain communities and of the opinions and issues faced by those communities. Being the leader of that voice gives them a certain power, the duty, as well as potential opportunities to reach institutional agendas. The general theory on agenda-setting applies to NGOs. They need to be ready when a window of opportunity arises, and are part of the streams. Indeed, NGOs can be part of the politics stream by creating a rationale behind the necessity to make policies, the policy stream by giving viable solutions and by acting as entrepreneurs for a cause and the problem stream by identifying issues. In essence, they can advocate for a cause in a fully rounded way. To make the most of their advocacy power, NGOs therefore need to set up strategies that involve several factors in order to reach the agenda of international organisations.

## 2.2 NGO AGENDA-SETTING STRATEGY THEORY

The agenda setting powers of an NGO differ from that of governmental actors. In itself, they do not hold legislative powers and thus their main role is one of influence. Therefore, their ability to set the agenda is of utmost importance (Joachim 2007, Thiel

& Uçarer 2014, Buntinx & Colli 2021). In her study of women's rights NGO's and their agenda-setting role and effect at the United Nations, Joachim (2007) came forward with a three-way process to analyse the methods used by NGOs to reach the agenda of an organization. The first step is the framing process where NGOs need a "framing strategy" that will identify an issue, identify solutions and mobilize support. In order to do so, NGOs use arguments that target audiences find both resonant and credible (Benford & Snow 2000, Joachim 2007, Busby 2007). Secondly, in the same way Howlett et al. (2020) talk about both routinized and discretionary political windows, Joachim explains that several elements of the "political opportunity structure" (which includes the changing of political constellations, influential allies as well as the access to institutions) can provide NGO's with windows for successful advocacy. However, these windows may only be used effectively if the NGO has adequate "*mobilizational structures*", or the tools and the capacity to take advantage of the windows. In this context, capacity is defined as entrepreneurship and credible expertise but not resources.

### 2.2.1 THE DEFINITION OF INFLUENCE IN THE CONTEXT OF NGO AGENDA-SETTING

NGOs have increasingly sought to influence supranational policymaking (Thiel & Uçarer 2014). This research takes on the same definition of influence as Betsill & Corell (2008), who concluded that NGOs achieve an indirect "effect" by intentionally "manipulating" the policymakers (Panahirad 2010). By defining influence as such, we can start looking at what actions are or should be undertaken by NGOs in order to have that indirect effect and in order to manipulate policy-makers. This requires an understanding of how the participation of NGOs can be transferred into influence. Regardless of the level of influence of NGOs, it is likely that it will always remain limited. Indeed, since in intergovernmental organisations it is in general member-states and not non-members that have decisive authority, NGOs will in commonly have to be satisfied with a consultative mandate. Because of this reality, the strength of the civil society is rooted within their capacity to raise an issue to the agenda of international organizations (Joachim 2007, Joachim & Leachner 2009, Risse 2002, Steffek, Kissling & Nanz 2008, Willetts 1998). In the context of an NGO, having an



influence in agenda-setting is in general defined as their ability to access the institutions of a specific international organization, for example the institutions of the EU (Bouwen 2004, p. 340) and their ability to raise an issue to their agenda. Put shortly, influence is the ability to make a targeted group recognise an issue (Cashore & Howlett 2020).

### 2.2.2 THE FRAMING OF AN ISSUE

Successful frames are the *“strategic efforts by groups of people to fashion shared understandings of the world and of themselves that legitimate and motivate collective action”* (McAdam, McCarthy and Zald 1996b, 6). Framing happens both consciously and unconsciously, however for successful advocacy, it is very important that an actor spends time on framing. The framing process is a constructivist concept that puts a strong emphasis on the subjectivity and reality of actors’ interpretations of issues. Framing theory shows up in almost every study on advocacy and agenda-setting strategies (Keck and Sikkink 1998, Joachim 2007, Princen 2011, Tallberg et al. 2015). Benford & Snow (2000) explain that the theory of framing gives a clarification as to how claims and grievances can be negotiated and how they are sustained in the political and policy cycle (Panahirad 2010). The reason framing is deemed to be important in the context of advocacy is because it does not require a plethora of financial resources and yet it will allow actors to *“convince each other as well as the general public that certain policy proposals constitute acceptable solutions to pressing problems”* (Campbell 1998, 381). As Joachim (2007) pointed out, if an NGO does not hold much financial power or resources, they rely heavily on public support and communication is their strongest asset. This signifies that when exerting influence, an NGO will have to frame issues in order to gain as much support and understanding as possible, both at the organisation they advocate but also beyond it. To comprehend why framing is a major source of agenda-setting power, it is necessary to clarify what framing processes really are. According to Snow and Benford (1998) and Joachim (2007), there are three distinct types of framing processes: diagnostic, prognostic and motivational.

First, scholars have identified *diagnostic framing*. This is the “*identification of a problem and the attribution of blame and, or, causality*” (Joachim 2007, 20). In other words, it is how an NGO or a group identifies a problem and recognizes it as needing a solution. In order for this to happen, there needs to be a mental shift from individual blaming towards system critical blaming. McAdam (1982) calls this “*cognitive liberation*”. This implies that there has to be a realisation that an issue, rather than being incidental, is the result of “*prevailing structural dislocations*”. As an example, Joachim uses the rapid spread of AIDS in southern countries. In the beginning all the blame was put on the reckless behaviour of gay men and drug users, but this was eventually turned around as people started to recognize the issue was mainly a socio-economic one related to poverty. It is at the diagnostic phase that we identify which actors can have an opinion on certain issues and which actors are responsible for it. If the diagnostic framing is done successfully, individuals will feel aggrieved about the issue (McAdam, McCarthy and Zald 1996, 5) and they will realise that if they start acting collectively, the problem can be solved. If both of those conditions are not met, it is unlikely that there will be any mobilization (Joachim 2007).

Second, there is *prognostic framing*. Here the NGO will form solutions to a diagnosed problem. In this step, the advocate has to identify all possibilities to resolve the issue: from technical fixes to legal instruments, including the development of strategies (Princen 2011), tactics and targets, and research transfer of resources and education (Gordenker 1995, Joachim 2007). Since solutions are not always clear-cut, prognostic framing often includes multiple actors with different interests looking at a problem in a different way and sometimes even attacking each other (Benford & Snow 2000). Generally, one can expect two lobbying coalitions, one favouring and one opposing a certain policy proposal (Baumgartner et al., 2009, p 6). In order to have an effect on the agenda of an IO, an NGO thus needs to formulate a joint solution including as many actors as possible so that those actors can tackle the issue together.

However, diagnosing problems and finding solutions is not enough to mobilise support, so the third step is *motivational framing*. Here, the frame will provide a reasoning behind the engagement of collective action (Panarahid 2010). Through

motivational framing people will have a reason or motive as to why they should act. Multiple strategies can be used here, the most important and consequential ones being frame amplification and frame bridging (Snow & Benford 2000). Frame bridging is when an NGO manages to relate and attach its claim to an issue that is already salient but not necessarily initially relevant to that claim. Frame amplification involves the idealization, embellishment, clarification, or invigoration of existing values or beliefs of the international organisation, thus including the necessity to act within a broader moral and noble responsibility that is held by the organisation. Depending on the issue and the NGO, this reasoning can either be on moral or normative grounds. Human rights NGOs such as Human Rights Watch or Amnesty International might for example invoke the Universal Declaration of Human Rights if they want support for the rights and freedoms of political prisoners. A development NGO might use the argument of social justice when asking for funding from western organisations (Joachim 2007). Some will take a more hopeless or dramatic approach in their motivational framing, where they push others to realise what will happen if no action is taken (Benford & Snow 2000). Regardless of the approach, an NGO has to make sure there are enough incentives for action. In a nutshell, an NGO has to consider and present an issue in three different ways if it wants to gain support: diagnostic framing, which offers systemic explanations for the existence of a particular problem; prognostic framing, which involves proposals for alternative courses of action; and motivational framing, which is a call to arms (Joachim 2007).

However, the framing process also needs to resonate with the target audience. Snow and Benford (1988: 208–10; 2000) enumerate four criteria that appear to be particularly decisive in regards to whether the whole framework will actually appeal to the targeted groups and help the issue gain support. The issue should be presented in a way that makes it *central* to the target group: the essential beliefs and values associated to the frames of the NGO have to be central in some way to the targets of mobilization. The more central or salient the espoused beliefs, ideas, and values of a movement are to the targets of mobilization, the greater the probability of their mobilization. The framing needs to be *empirically credible*, meaning the framework actually aligns and verifies events within a broader context. This is why an NGO needs expertise before

bringing up an issue. The more culturally believable the claimed evidence, and the greater the number of such evidence, the more credible the framing and the broader its appeal. Furthermore, the framing needs to have *experiential commensurability*. This will show whether the framing speaks to those for which it has been developed by for example including elements of interest to international organisations to explain how acting will also help them in other areas that are important to them. The framing therefore needs to be relatable in some way to the group it is aimed at. Lastly, the frame needs *narrative fidelity*, meaning the degree to which it resonates with cultural myths or symbols: the story needs to fit within the general culture of the organisation or of the actors within that organisation. Nevertheless, despite all these important elements to factor in when setting up and adapting a framing strategy, one should note a danger. If an NGO becomes more important in its role and evolves into a leading NGO in its advocacy area or in general, it may, by wanting to keep that place and by framing to stay relevant, becoming fearful of causing controversy. It can then be at risk of losing its true identity (Murdie & Stroup 2012). This means that all needs to be done, within measure.

Nonetheless, most authors will agree that framing in itself is not enough for an NGO to be able to put an issue on the agenda of the EU or of any IO, even if it will help gain public support and mobilization, which in turn creates a greater force to impose an issue on the agenda. Framing is therefore the basis for good agenda-setting, but it requires other factors to be taken into account. Good framing needs to involve good ways of finding support, effective ways to gain attention and credibility. In order to do so, an NGO needs to understand, navigate and use the political opportunity structure of an organisation and to develop and empower its own mobilizational structure.

### 2.2.3 THE POLITICAL OPPORTUNITY STRUCTURE

As mentioned above, in itself framing is not enough and it will be both heavily influenced by the political structure in which an NGO finds itself and influence the same political structure. This political opportunity structure is the “*broader institutional*

*context that provides opportunities for or imposes constraints on NGOs engaged in framing processes”* (Joachim 2007: 24). While an NGO may use political structures to its advantage, they do not always have control over them. NGOs’ strategies thus need to address political structures both actively and passively. The three main pillars constituting the political structure in which advocacy actors evolve are “*institutional access*”, “*allies*” and “*political alignments and conflicts*” (Joachim 2007).

The idea of institutional access suggests that an NGO needs to have access to the institutions of which it wants to influence the agenda-setting. Without this access, the influence becomes considerably challenging. An example is the creation of institutions or forums specifically made for NGO cooperation by international organisations, such as the EU. As Thiel and Uçarer (2014) point out, the reason NGOs manage to insert themselves in the policy making process of the EU is highly dependent on the already existing ties (both formal and informal) to EU institutions. This is why human-rights based NGOs tend to have a higher likelihood of involvement because of the Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) that contains a civil society platform directly picking up NGO claims. However, the EU-FRA is focussed mostly on the respect of human rights within the EU, and therefore advocacy for external breaches mostly happens in other EU institutions where the priority to listen to civil society and non-governmental actors does not stand as high.

A second big aspect of political opportunity which will enhance the chances of an NGO to have influence and which is often part of advocacy strategies is the *allies* an NGO possesses, in particular powerful ones (Joachim 2007, Jacobs & Zito 2009). They can “*facilitate the mobilization of support for new issues and solutions as a result of the resources they possess*” (Joachim 2007: 26). Among those allies we may find foundations, the media, governments and other international organizations for example. Through networking and advocacy at different levels and on different fronts, an NGO can extend their influence on a specific organisation by forming alliances with external actors (Gneiting 2016) This often leads to cooperation or collaboration and research has regularly pointed out that advocacy finds its strength in numbers. As was found in research done by HIVOs on NGOs representing groups from the LGBT+ community

under threat in Zimbabwe where NGOs, when disposing of allies can shield themselves from attacks as well as join groups and coalitions to address larger agendas (Dütting and Sogge 2010). Interestingly, within that same study it was found that the most intensive collaboration is often within specific human rights sectors. In India and Latin America for example, despite NGOs developing on a geographical basis, those that have the most longevity are often NGOs with thematic emphasis such as the rights of women or minorities (Dütting and Sogge 2010).

Thirdly, the access to the agenda of international organizations will also be influenced by the *political alignments and conflicts* brought up by a particular issue. Manifested in the existence of different voting blocs and differing opinions, changes in political alignments can create opportunities for an NGO (Joachim 2007). In particular, newly emerging blocs may look for outside support to consolidate their still fragile positions (Tarrow 1994). Moreover, political alignments can manifest itself with agreements or disagreements between big global powers – for example, if the US supports a specific issue, the EU might be more lenient to support it as well. However, political alignment does not come without risks either. The danger of an NGO politically aligning itself with a party or government may alienate it from influencing the organisation it wants to influence (McAdam et al. 1996, Panahirad 2014). In that sense, powerful allies and political alignment are closely intertwined, although an NGO takes on a more passive role at this step and simply has to take advantage of opportunities when they present themselves and thread carefully in order to circumvent potential conflicts or restraints created by those alignments.

Therefore, if a leading political actor voices their opinion on a certain issue or decides to raise something to the agenda, it is likely several other actors will follow. On the other hand, the potential of a specific problem harming the interests of a political group is also possible and, in that case, there may be a great obstacle to influence. Here, it is thus important that an NGO identifies political alignments of the organisation they approach and that it adapts its framing process in accordance to the changes the organisation experiences.

#### 2.2.4. THE MOBILIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

Not only will the political structure change the effectiveness of framing, the mobilization ability and structure of an NGO will also have a significant effect. From the literature, within that mobilizational structure, two elements stand out as most important: the entrepreneurship of the NGO and its expertise (Joachim 2007, Joachim & Locher 2009). Within this mobilizational structure, Joachim (2007) emphasizes three important factors.

Firstly, there needs to be *organizational entrepreneurship*. This implies that “*individuals or organizations who care enough about an issue to absorb the initial costs of mobilizing, bring with them a wealth of organizing experiences, are well connected, and have vision and charisma*” (Joachim 2007, Oliver & Marwell 1993). In accordance with general agenda-setting theory and Kingdon’s streams that were previously mentioned, the agenda-setting entrepreneur would therefore be the one who takes it upon itself to bind the different streams together. This factor of successful advocacy is an extremely important one as it encompasses many elements. Indeed, in order to exert influence, a successful NGO will have to set up strategies, raise funds, mobilise others, set long term and short-term goals, create a network and overtime develop a strong basis for its advocacy to which other organisations may later attach themselves. If an NGO shows entrepreneurship, it can use its framing to influence the start and the direction of a debate or a policy process (Müller & Slominski 2019). In the case of human rights advocacy, they become “*moral policy entrepreneurs*” (Buntinx & Colli 2021). When an NGO takes on an entrepreneurial role, it can become a leading organisation for the cause it advocates for and/or an umbrella organisation, depending on the circumstances. Becoming a leading voice, longevity, financial power and a broad network will in turn enhance the credibility of the NGO in the eyes of the organisation it wishes to influence.

Secondly, an extremely important factor on the mobilizational capacity and structure of an NGO is its level of *knowledge and expertise*. This stems from the premise that on the contrary of governments, international organisations are dependent on multiple

forms of information that often cannot be sufficiently or efficiently generated within the organisation (Tallberg et al. 2015: 8). If an NGO is seen as the central reliable resource in a specific area, it will have a lot more leverage in international agenda-setting. Indeed, if it is seen as a credible and reliable source of information and is presumed objective and neutral, the NGO will have a lot more power as IOs will rely on their expertise to make judgment. Expertise is closely interlinked with framing as the information provided by an NGO will often be framed depending on the ears that are listening (Tallberg et al. 2015).

## 2.3 NGO AGENDA-SETTING IN THE EU

Now that the general literature on agenda-setting and NGO strategies, influence and advocacy has been reviewed and put into a structure that will enable an analysis of an empirical case, it is time to clarify how agenda-setting works in the case of the EU and what specific challenges and structures NGOs face and can make use of in this context.

In EU studies, agenda setting has only become the subject of systematic inquiry in the last two decades or so, following some notable scholars in the 1990s (Peters, 1994, 2001; Pollack, 1997). Since then, however, a growing literature has developed, which studies the rise on the EU agenda of individual issues and the overall shape of the EU agenda (Princen 2015). The rise of research in that area and the rise of the role of advocacy can be explained by multiple factors. First of all, with the fall of the USSR and the decline of communism, there was a rise of programs and financial support for NGOs and an improvement of their institutional access and recognition (Joachim & Locher 2009, Lieber & Trenz 2011, Thiel & Uçarer 2014). Secondly, the democratic deficit of the EU has been a positive enabler for the advocacy power of rights NGOs in the European Union. Due to this deficit, there was an increase in access points in Brussels and a desire to use civil society and NGOs to enhance participatory democracy (Prügl and Thiel 2009). For example, there was a serious improvement of the channels of interest representation through initial recognition as well as more funding of civil society



actors (Cram 2011, Thiel & Uçarer 2014). In its 2001 report on human rights, the European Commission stated that they would “*build on experience and continue the dialogue on human rights and democratisation issues with civil society and NGOs both through its delegations and in Brussels, including through the Human Rights Contact Group meeting in the European Parliament.*” (EC 2001). However, despite an encouraging position from the EU itself, if an NGO wants to profit from the need for participatory democracy, it needs to be resourceful and show it can play a good intermediary role between the EU and its society (Junk 2015). On the other hand, one can also consider that there is a technocratic deficit in the EU, due to its transnational and multilevel structure. The European institutions have to deal, on the daily, with an extremely wide spectrum of technical issues and subjects, thus requiring expertise from different sources (Vannoni 2012). This is why the involvement of European NGOs can also be used as a counterweight to the technocratic limits of the organisation (Greenwood 2009).

Because of its unique structure in comparison to any other international organisations, characterised by its advanced multilevel governance system, the EU has agenda-setting factors, venues and strategies that are unique to itself. These all fit within the general framework of agenda-setting, but some additional elements need to be taken into account in the NGOs’ strategies for the EU.

#### 2.4.1. FOCAL POINTS OF AGENDA-SETTING ANALYSIS IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

While the framework previously elaborated on exposes an overarching strategy supposedly used by NGOs to reach the agenda of international organisations, and while that strategy applies to the European Union as well, there are certain elements of uniqueness proper to the latter. This is due to the fact the EU is a very unique type of international organisation, holding real legislative powers and the ability to control the implementation of its legislation seeing as it is, to this day, the most advanced form an international organisation has ever taken. While the EU is an institution that

deserves advocacy attention from NGOs, the organisation itself also needs input from civil society. The cooperation is thus a win-win situation. Analysis and research in recent years has shown the value of NGO participation for the efficiency and the legitimacy of EU policies. However, the EU also remains careful in its NGO inclusion, as problems can arise in regards to the true democratic aspect and the input and output legitimacy issues created by NGO inclusion into EU governance (Steffek et al 2008, Beyers et al 2009, Kohler-Koch 2021, Lindgren and Persson 2011, Thiel and Uçarer 2014)

In his study of agenda-setting strategies in EU policy processes, Princen (2011) came up with four different strategies, applied by all types of political actors, to place issues on the European Union agenda. These four strategies, according to him, are heavily influenced by two challenges all actors face when wishing to influence the EU and by two factors they can affect. These are respectively: gaining attention and building credibility; and venues and frames. This is similar to Joachim's (2007) overall approach for the UN as well, where frames are essential to any action and where venues, although not as important as Princen would argue they are in the case of the EU, can both positively and negatively affect the power of NGOs. In order to gain attention, actors need and will look to mobilize supporters as well as arouse interest in the issue at hand. Therefore, as part of its framing, its entrepreneurship, its search for allies and its use of political opportunities, an NGO has to always focus on using a tactic that will bring it the most supporters and arouse the most interest. In order to increase their credibility, advocacy actors will attempt to build capacity and claim authority on a certain issue. As part of its entrepreneurship, of its networking process when looking for allies, of its expertise building and of its search for institutional access, an NGO will constantly try to heighten its capacity and thus to take on an authoritative role on the issue it advocates for. In the EU, scholars have found that the attention required for successful agenda-setting can be obtained through proactive advocacy (Thiel & Uçarer 2014), whereas credibility will be obtained if the actors choose effective and appropriate venues and frames, two aspects of the general agenda-setting process.

Therefore, while general NGO agenda-setting in international organisations and NGO agenda-setting in the EU are similar, EU research puts emphasis on these three elements: the framing, the access and the institutional venues.



Figure 1 - EU Opportunity Structures (Thiel & Uçarer 2014, adapted from Princen 2011)

This figure, adapted from Princen (2011) and enhanced by Thiel and Uçarer (2014) shows how different aspects of NGO agenda-setting are interconnected in the EU and how gaining attention and building credibility should take place. Indeed, the specific type of agenda-setting will influence the choice of institutional venues and the frames, and vice versa. The frames and the choice of institutional venues will help gaining attention and building credibility which will lead to access to the agenda. The opportunities for access will on the other hand also change the choice of institutional venues and the choice of frames by the EU.

2.4.2. FRAMING IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

As mentioned, there are several factors that should always be kept in mind to build an agenda-setting strategy appropriate to the European Union agenda setting strategy. The step of framing itself requires more attention as there are additional challenges specific to the EU. Indeed, an actor wishing to reach the EU agenda needs not only to explain and elaborate on the nature of problems and solutions to those problems and prove the necessity to act. Those who engage in a framing process also need to prove

the appropriateness of the EU as a level of government in that particular area. The EU has to have the impression they need to address the issue, so the framing has to include a story about why the issue is one that should be looked at the European level more so than at the domestic level or at any other institution. In most policy areas, the formal scope of the EU's authority is directly linked to cross-border concerns. This means that actors wishing to reach the agenda will have to argue for the European nature of an issue. In the case of EU anti-smoking policy studied by Princen (2004), those in favour of legislation restricting smoking, used the economic integration argument to get around legal restrictions on health-related harmonization and to put forward their proposal, even though public health was their primary motivator for placing the issue on the EU agenda.

The high threshold needed for decision-making in the EU – being the multiplicity of votes and the unanimity within the Council – makes any controversial subject difficult to defend and this therefore requires additional efforts from the start.

#### 2.4.3. LEVELS OF AGENDA-SETTING IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

Besides an additional challenge in framing, there is also a difference in agenda-setting due to the structure of the EU, which is why agenda-setting takes place in two ways: from above and from below (Princen & Rhinard 2006). This fits within the idea of institutional access mentioned previously. Agenda-setting from above implies that the agenda-setting can take place through high-level political institutions putting pressure on the EU to take action, and from below suggests that policy experts can formulate specific proposals to low-level groups and working parties. These two ways are not mutually exclusive and often interact, a mixture of both thus leads to higher chances of success. This means that advocates and lobbyists can attempt to build up influence from the bottom and make specific proposals to organisations or entities that influence the EU such as the UN or the USA; they can speak directly to EU institutions but they can also try to convince member states and ruling parties to take on their fight and defend their cause with them.

Regarding the multiplicity of ways to reach the agenda, Delaney and Leitner (1997) adapted the concept of political construction of scale to the EU. This concept says that political actors have the ability to influence the scale at which problems and their causes are situated and the scale at which they are regulated (Kurtz 2003, Princen 2007), through framing and through action. This means that an advocacy actor is perfectly capable of changing the level at which an issue is addressed from a domestic to an international one. Research has shown for example that NGOs at the EU level therefore use inside lobbying by addressing EU institutions and outside lobbying by addressing the public (through the media) (Junk 2015). However, it is important to note that EU decision-makers are less vulnerable to public mobilization than decision-makers in democratic domestic polities (Princen 2007) and therefore an NGO does not need to put as much focus in mobilizing the public to influence the EU than it would if it were trying to influence a government.

Encompassing the framing, political structure and mobilizational structure, EU studies have focussed more on specific strategies that included all three steps and that highlight the importance of framing choice and venue choice. In the EU, more so than in any organization, the venue choice for direct contact is very important and while one issue might easily reach the agenda and the higher agenda through parliamentarians, another might have to start from a specific committee or another institution instead. Therefore, it is key that an NGO strategizes accordingly and chooses their venue for advocacy and the type of communication for each venue properly. Research has rightly noted that within the EU context, almost all issues will find at least one interested participant in the decision-making process as there is a plethora of access points, but simply one participant will never be enough for change and an NGO should thus aim for a higher agenda status (Peters 2001; Princen 2007, 38; Stoop 2021). While the outcome of successful agenda-setting is not the focus of this study, it is still important to take this factor into account to ensure the agenda-setting is as valuable as it possibly could be. Peters (2001) has drawn a very big contrast between the ease of gaining agenda access and the difficulty of the following policy-

making steps such as decision-making and implementation. It is thus very important for an NGO to gain access to the agenda in the EU at multiple institutions (Peters 2001, Princen 2007).

#### 2.4.4 RELEVANT VENUES FOR AGENDA-SETTING IN THE EU FOR EXTERNAL HUMAN RIGHTS

For human rights NGOs, there are three major venues of insertion into the policy process: the European parliament, in particular with the EU parliament subcommittee on human rights and the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights; the European Commission; and the EEAS with the EU-NGO Human Rights forum which is organized yearly.

The European Parliament has made a conscious effort to not only give importance to NGOs, but in particular promote human rights and support human rights' advocacy. Within the Parliament itself there are of course numerous political actors NGOs can address themselves to, who might be open to their plight. However, as previously noted, addressing certain individual members of parliament is unlikely to cause great result as they only hold very little power individually. Consequently, while advocacy in the Parliament might not lead to MPs advertising the NGO, they might generate support for the initial cause of advocacy. The European Parliament itself has multiple ways of including NGOs and other exterior advocacy actors as well as supporting causes. For example, every year the Parliament awards the "Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought", which is arguably the most visible action of human rights activist support of the Parliament since it has a significant impact for the laureates who get recognition and protection. Besides Members of Parliament, advocacy groups have other points of influence and opportunities for advocacy entries. Indeed, the Subcommittee on Human Rights is entirely dedicated to the promotion of fundamental rights and the raise of awareness on human rights infringements around the world. The European Parliament's Subcommittee on Human Rights (DROI) claims to "*raise awareness on specific human rights situations, engage with a broad range of*

*interlocutors and oversee the respect for human rights in the EU's external actions, with an added emphasis on ensuring coherence between all the Union's external policies"* which includes human rights and trade policies. Thus, scrutinising the implementation of EU human rights policy as well as evaluating the impact and contribution in human rights, rule of law and democracy promotion in partner countries is one of the main roles of the DROI. To fulfil its role, the subcommittee exchanges views, studies and reports, missions to partner countries as well as international and regional human rights organisations (Arena 2021, DROI report 2014-2019). Besides these very useful actors that will help to reach the agenda, the European parliament has also created, in 1994, what is today called the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EUR-Lex 2007). Through the instrument, the EU selects projects after local, regional and global calls for proposals, using, according to them "objective and transparent criteria" (European Parliament 2015).

The European Commission (EC) is the legislative body of the EU and thus the one shaping policy. In their own words, the ECs' role is to shape the EU's overall strategy, propose new EU laws and policies, monitor their implementation and manage the EU budget. The commission also has a significant role in supporting international development and delivering aid (European Commission 2021). The European Commission strategy does not come about on its own however and is shaped by the agenda set up by the European Council. Moreover, the EU, specifically the EEAS (which main task is to support the EU in making and implementing foreign and development policies) organises a EU-NGO Human Rights forum every single year to include civil society in their discussions on a specific question. This means that not every single human right issue NGOs want to bring on the agenda will be on it. Every year a specific subject is chosen, for example in 2020 the discussion was around the impact of technology on human rights.

Last but not least, one major institution of the EU, the European Council, should be emphasized. Indeed, studies have shown that while the Commission and the European Parliament do have substantial power in shaping legislative outcomes, the

Council, which is composed of the representatives of each member state, does dominate most points of the legislative process (Costello & Thomson 2013). In that sense, it means that agenda-setting will hold a heavy weight if one manages to reach the agenda of the European Council, which is done by gaining support from the governments of member states, since the Council itself does not open its doors to NGOs (Butler 2008). However, it is not one of the EU's legislating bodies, so it does not negotiate or adopt EU laws. Instead, its main role is to determine the EU's general political direction and priorities, which essentially means setting the policy agenda for the EU. Thus, at the agenda-setting stage, influencing the European Council is of the utmost importance (EU).

## 2.4 KEY THEORETICAL TAKEAWAYS

In a nutshell, theory suggests that there are three main factors that go into agenda-setting by advocacy actors, NGOs in particular. The most crucial step is framing, which will be influenced and will influence the political opportunity structure and the mobilizing structure. Framing in itself will lead to an ability to influence all types of agenda-setting, as was set forward in the initial part of this theoretical framework, it is the most important step for reaching the systemic agenda, the other two parts of the framework will be determining influences (over which an NGO will hold power in some instance but will be constricted by in others) to the ability to reach the institutional agenda. If all three of these factors are optimal, the three streams (political, policy and public) will come together and create the chance of agenda-setting once a window of opportunity opens.



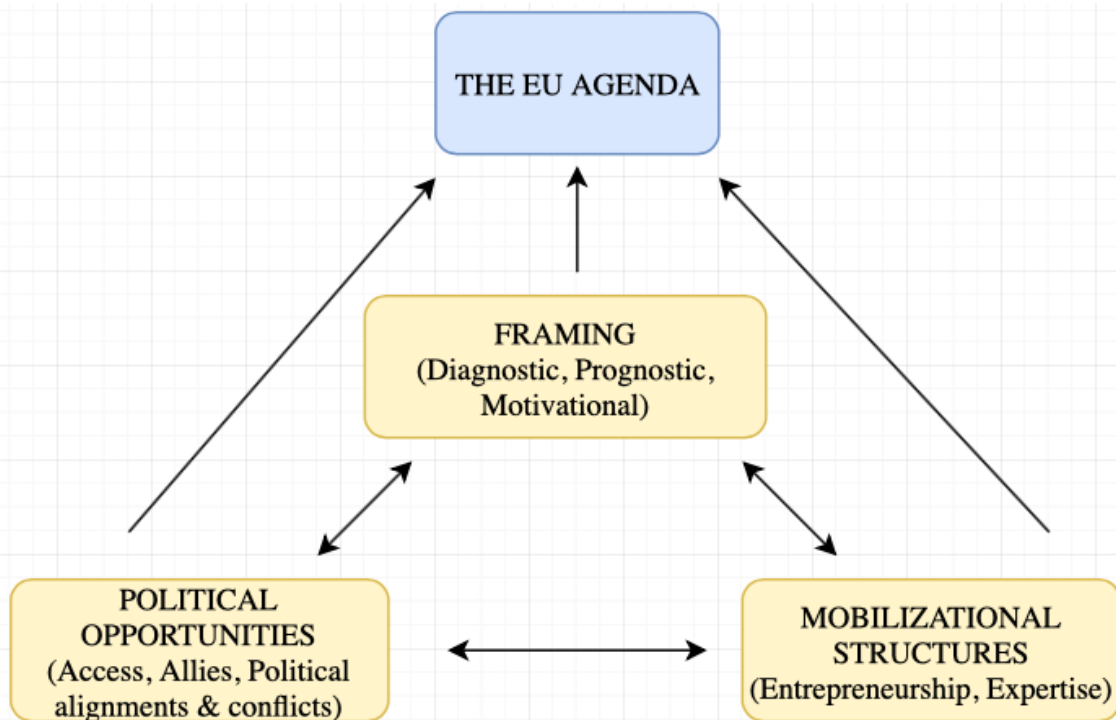


Figure 2 – The NGO agenda-setting framework (inspired by Joachim 2007 & Panarihad 2010)

Each step of the process (yellow boxes in fig.2) of influencing the agenda is related to the final possibility of success of reaching the agenda. This means that all three steps need to exist, are interconnected and the thoroughness of each step will influence the final success.

Diagnostic framing is the very first step of any advocacy process that has a potential of influencing external agenda-setting: if an issue is recognised and the blame is put in a way that connects with the interlocutor, the agenda-setting strategy can begin. Prognostic framing is when an NGO provides a solution to the problem, to the international organisation, thus facilitating the latter's work. Motivational framing is what NGOs will use in order to make their claims relevant to the actor they communicate with, here NGOs will make it clear to the actor that it is their role to address the issue at hand. All three steps have to be done in a way that is credible and salient, so that it resonates with the international organisation.

After that there are the factors that NGOs can influence but by which they are also influenced themselves. The *institutional access* provided by an international

organisation and its openness will either help or be a hurdle to reaching the IOs agenda, here NGOs play a role by finding the best ways to access the relevant institutions' agenda. *Allies* will enhance the voices of NGOs, this means that NGOs actively network and depending on the openness of the actors within and outside of the institution, will become more relevant and receive more attention from the IO. *Political alignment* also comes into play here, and depending on the political climate or the current events, NGOs will have or lack windows of opportunities that favour their plea.

The two last important variables that should be taken into account when studying the agenda-setting strategy of an NGO are the entrepreneurship and the expertise of the NGO. If an NGO shows *entrepreneurship* in its advocacy, it will have a bigger reach and achieve more because it will be recognised as a “leading” voice for a particular cause or movement. It will also incite agenda-setting by bringing together the streams if a window of opportunity appears. If an NGO has strong, broad and reliable *expertise* on a specific subject, their voice will reach further and actors will reach out to them for information, support and for counsel in their area of expertise.

## 3 – RESEARCH APPROACH

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*There is a plethora of theory on agenda-setting in general and a reasonable amount on NGO agenda-setting and the role of NGOs in the policy process. Scholars have also elaborated on potential strategies that could be used by NGOs in the European Union. However, there is little empirical research on the place of human rights NGOs in the EU. In today's world where information is so widely available yet hardly analysed, the combination of big data and rigorous social-scientific methods can make a strong contribution to science (Monroe et al. 2015, Toshkov 2016). The aim of this chapter is to clarify the scientific methods that will be used to answer the research question.*

### 3.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

The goal is to eventually answer the question: *how does the World Uyghur Congress influence the agenda-setting of the European Union?* To give the most cohesive answer, a rigorous method needs to be put into place. To select a research design in accordance with the research goals, Yin (2018, 43) has argued three main elements need to be taken into account:

- The type of research question.
- The extent of control one has over actual behavioural events.
- The degree of focus on the contemporary as opposed to historical events.

The research question is qualitative and explanatory. An answer to a “how” question cannot be quantified, and therefore the research is qualitative. Since the study is qualitative in nature, so will be the methods of data collection (interview, literature review and documental analysis) (Osifo 2014).

In general, the goal of explanatory research is *“to explain a particular case, to build a comprehensive causal account of a general phenomenon, or to establish a general causal relationship that holds for a population of cases”* (Toshkov 2016: 35). Complete explanatory theories attempt to provide a thorough account of how and why certain events (for example, transitions to democracy) occur. In this study, the main objective is to create a comprehensive account of NGO strategies to agenda-setting in a particular case. The theory that has already been reviewed in this study provides a complete account of how successful agenda-setting happens, the analysis of our study will test that theory to see whether it is actually possible to apply it empirically, and it will be used as a tool to understand a phenomenon: that of the WUC strategies at the EU.

Trying to explain a case will not require control over behavioural events, and the events in question are contemporary. Using Yin’s deduction model (2017, 43) to determine a research design, the research question implies that the study will be performed as a single case study. Yin (2018: 18) defines it a single case study as *“an empirical enquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident”*. Correspondingly to the idea of *“thick description”* provided by ethnographer Clifford Geertz (1973), a case study entails the thorough analysis of the *“complex and particularistic nature of distinct phenomena”* (Willis 2014: 1). Single case studies study phenomena held within a specific context. Their strength is that they give an in depth understanding of one specific area of research and can provide a valuable specific scientific contribution. Indeed, as Stake would put it, case studies are defined by the interest in a particular case and not the methodology behind it. The object of the study itself, the case, is *“a specific, unique, bounded system”* (2008: 445).

One may ask themselves what the point of such a study is. Single case studies allow researchers to get a profound understanding as well as a deeper more precise overview of a specific subject within a more general theme (Yin 2003). In this study that signifies the understanding of the WUC agenda-setting strategy at the EU within a broader research framework aiming to understand the functioning and implications

of human rights NGOs and their advocacy within international organisations and more precisely, within the EU. Consequently, each single case study can be placed into a “*more general reference class*” (Toshkov 2016: 288), making scientific research possible. Without fitting into the broader context of NGO influence and advocacy, agenda-setting research as well as EU agenda-setting research, this study would not be possible. This study is relevant for NGOs with similar goals—NGOs that wish to influence the EU’s external policies in a way that is. However, as Toshkov highlighted “*the connection between the empirical case and existing theories needs to be even stronger than in the context of comparative, quantitative, or experimental research*” (2016: 285). Thus, it is of high importance to have a strong theoretical framework and operationalisation. A thorough operationalisation will be shown at the end of this chapter.

## 3.2 CASE SELECTION

One may then ask about the relevance of such a case to science. Toshkov points out that “*Substantive relevance is about the real-world societal importance of the case. Such importance may stem from the relevance of the case for broad groups of people or society and the economy at large.*” (2016: 289). This relevance is due to the fact that one case will always remain a case within a broader phenomenon. The relevance of a study on the World Uyghur Congress has already been explained in the introduction of the study but shall be further elaborated upon here.

The WUC case is relevant to the theoretical framework because its cause involves so many different interests, requires such thorough framing and puts decision-makers in front of a multiplicity of difficulties. It adds different challenges on the road to agenda-setting success in comparison to previously studied policy and advocacy sectors. Thus the initial assumption is that there will be a strong strategy set up by an NGO. Indeed, China being one of the main economic powers of the world at the moment, stating any criticism can have hard-hitting consequences, as was the case when Australia stood up to China on its own (BBC 2021). Chen, in her study of the Uyghur Lobby and the WUC

in 214 argues that at the time, one diasporic group stands out “*as the most prominent, having garnered far more global notoriety and, arguably, influence than any other Uyghur organization: the WUC*” (Chen 2014, 6). Two major aspects of the WUC make it a fascinating organisation and object of study.

The first interesting part relates to the issue they address. The second reason explaining the relevance of the WUC to our study is the structure and the position of the WUC in the world of Uyghur advocacy. As its central mission, the WUC advocates for democracy, human rights and freedom for the Uyghur people through peaceful, nonviolent, and democratic means in order to determine their political future and their right to self-determination. Their plight is a controversial one. The question of the human rights of Uyghurs naturally belongs to the foreign policy and external affairs of the European Union. On the one hand, the EU wants to put forward their promotion of human rights but on the other hand, because of China’s importance in today’s economical world, the EU has a lot of interest in maintaining good relations. It is therefore thought-provoking to see how in this difficult and multifaceted context an NGO can still manage to influence the EU. The reconversion camps for Uyghurs have been part of a set Chinese policy since 2017. However, it is only since 2019 and even more importantly since December 2020 that the EU has started mentioning Uyghur struggles on their higher agenda. Although the actual measuring of the Congress’ influence is not part of this research, noticing on a larger scale that Uyghur advocacy seems to be successful makes the studying of its strategies even more relevant. The WUC has also been selected due to its relevance in advocacy today, with a previous study on its branches in Japan, the US and Germany by Chen in 2014 as well as because of the fact it is an umbrella NGO affiliated to a large number of smaller Uyghur advocacy groups. Consequently, it gives resources and strengthens the identity of the smaller, national Uyghur NGOs while holding a certain degree of responsibility towards them. Research has shown that umbrella groups are reflections of the organizational practices of members (Stroup 2012, Murdie & Stroup 2012). The Uyghur Congress has been qualified as both an umbrella and leading advocacy organization. It has 35 affiliates around the world and is part of the Coalition to End Forced Labour

in the Uyghur Region as well as the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organisation (UNPO). Lastly, the advocacy of the WUC will be studied specifically in relation to the EU as the latter takes on so many different levels and subjects of policy and actively promotes civil society inclusion. The opportunities for agenda-setting are therefore, if not endless, very broad. Moreover, the European Union is the most integrated form of an international organisation to this day. Therefore, the impact agenda-setting and the following steps of the policy cycle are much larger than that of a less integrated organisation. Thus, entering the policy cycle of the EU has a direct and important impact on its member countries as well.

### 3.3 METHODOLOGY

The methodology of a study involves scientific steps taken to reach an eventual discovery. This implies the necessity to understand a problem, make a plan, carry out the plan and then to review the study. As an equation, a study needs to look like this:

*“Theories + phenomena + data = findings”* (Osifo 2014: 1)

The theories relating to our case study have been elaborated upon thus, since the phenomenon of the WUCs advocacy has been presented it is now time to analyse the data and apply the theory to the case.

As Yin (2018) noted, in single case studies the most important element is the case itself and not so much the methods used, which is why a plethora of methods are at our disposal. The most relevant ones shall be used for our specific case study. Data will be collected through process tracing. Process tracing is a method that can be used at all levels: It can be used for example to study individuals, organizations, institutions and states. For process tracing, data can be collected in multiple ways such as archival research, document analysis and several types of interviews etc. (Toshkov 2016: 300). The relevance of process tracing to our case is that it can probe the assumptions theory has given and it can paint a more realistic picture of what actors want, their ideas and their capabilities to reach their goals (Toshkov 2016: 300).

Considering we aim to understand how exactly NGOs exert influence and what their strategies are, painting a more realistic picture of NGOs, their wants, their needs and capabilities, is exactly what will allow us to collect the data and test our current existing theory. Toshkov (2016, 300) explains that one way to do so is through interviews and another is to examine written sources – speeches, minutes from meetings, and so on. Evidence from verbal and written sources can answer questions about actors’ motivations and ideas directly. Toshkov (2016, 300) gives us the example of a politician who may have voted a certain way, and documents will only show that, whilst she can explain that her position was due to a deal she struck with another politician. That information will be provided only through direct communication with the actor rather than through information made publicly available.

The data collection for our case will be done by analysing the phenomenon of EU-NGO relations and the documents proving of their interaction with the WUC, through press releases and other public information provided by the WUC and through an interview with a key player of a Uyghur advocacy NGO who are involved with the EU agenda-setting process.

STEP 1	Review and analysis of all readily available data (Document analysis)
STEP 2	Conduction and analysis of interview
STEP 3	Analysis and triangulation of all collected data and theory application

Table 1 – Methodology

### 3.3.2 DOCUMENT ANALYSIS

The first step of the data collection is document analysis *which includes a range of activities seeking to reveal information hidden in documents and document collections*. The analysis of documents can provide insights into basic issues and set the tone for the rest of the more specific research.



Process-tracing will involve the study of documents released by the Uyghur Congress, previous studies related to the WUCs strategies, media reports, joint letters and letters by the WUC, written to the EU. It will also include all documents and information available on the WUC website. This data will be collected using the websites of different EU institutions, of the World Uyghur Congress and Google.

The documents used for this study can be found in Annex II.

### 3.3.2 INTERVIEW

Lastly, the research relies on an interview with the Uyghur Congress policy coordinator at the European Union. An interview is a primary source of data collection and requires preparation. It is a conversation between two persons or more and takes the form of a conversation that is followed by either note taking or electronic device recording (Hancké 2009, Osifo 2014). The interview will result in creating a better initial understanding of the actual power dynamics and the thought that goes into attempts of agenda-setting in reality. The interview in this research is semi-structured. This type of interview “*typically consists of a dialogue between researcher and participant, guided by a flexible interview protocol and supplemented by follow-up questions, probes and comments*” (DeJonckheere and Vaughn 2019: 1). For this case study, the interview will be conducted with the EU coordinator for the World Uyghur Congress, Koen Stoop directly involved in agenda-setting at the EU level, in framing and in advocacy for the Uyghur cause. The interview is made of open and closed questions allowing the interviewee to freely expand on certain elements. His expertise is relevant to this study as he is the executive and co-thinker of the strategies employed by the Congress in relation to the European Union and his thoughts and declarations of first-hand experiences will serve us as a strong basis of information to hold against existing theory.

## 3.4 OPERATIONALISATION

The following operationalisation table is based on the premises that it should help find out whether the WUC focusses on all possible variables that would help reach the EU agenda.

<b>Term</b>	<b>Concept</b>	<b>Links with the influence on agenda-setting</b>	<b>Indicators of success</b>	<b>Data sources</b>
<b>Diagnostic Framing</b>	Identifying a problem relevant to the International Organisation and attributing the causes and blame of the problem	If the problem is of relevance to the actor that is being addressed, they are more likely to take it on their agenda and the influence process can start.	Existence of an accurate/argued identification of the problem related to the EU's policy scope.	<u>WUC documents</u> Communications between the WUC and the EU.
<b>Prognostic Framing</b>	Identification of solutions to the diagnosed problem(s)	The NGO will here show a solution to the problem they are advocating for, thus making the work for the International Organisation easier	Provision of a solution to the problem they present to the EU.	<u>WUC documents</u> Interview
<b>Motivational Framing</b>	Providing a motivation and justification to the call of action from a specific group.	If the IO feels like they are responsible for addressing a certain issue, they are more likely to bring it to their agenda than if they feel the responsibility lies elsewhere.	Inclusion of the EU as an important actor, explanation of its necessity to act on normative or moral grounds.	<u>WUC documents</u> Interview Communications between the WUC and the EU.
<b>General Framing</b>	Strategic effort to create a shared understanding of an issue and stimulate collective action	The framing needs to be credible and salient in order for the target group to feel compelled to act	Centrality, empirical credibility, experiential commensurability and narrative fidelity of the frame	<u>Documents made available by the NGO</u> Interview Document research
<b>Political opportunity (Access to Institutions)</b>	Possibility to get into the organisation and use of those opportunities.	The more open the political system of the international organisation is the more possibilities there are for the NGOs to influence the agenda setting. The more institutions the NGO is active at, the higher agenda it will reach.	Campaigns organised with different groups, communications to the different EU institutions, existence of voices influenced by the NGO	<u>Documents made available by the NGO</u> Interview

<b>Political opportunity (Allies)</b>	Level of networking with partners, relevance of those partners.	The more networking and the better the partner, the more opportunities an NGO will have to make their voice heard (directly and indirectly)	Campaigns organised with different groups, voices speaking up as a consequence of the NGOs advocacy and networking efforts.	Document research Interview
<b>Political opportunity (Political alignment and conflicts)</b>	Political climate faced by the NGO in regards to their cause	If political actors and governments stance aligns themselves with that of an NGO, its claim is more likely to reach the agenda. However, if an NGO aligns with a government or political party it other groups or the IO as a whole not wanting to support or be associated to the NGO.	Making use of the political alignments with the cause of the EU and of the actors within the EU. Avoiding associations that could be controversial and create more problems than benefits.	Interview Document research
<b>Mobilizational structures (Entrepreneurship)</b>	Acting like a policy entrepreneur for its cause. Showing fundraising, cooperation, collaboration and action taking abilities.	The more an NGO leads a movement, organises advocacy campaigns, participates in networks, communicates and coordinates, the more power it will have if a window of opportunity presents itself.	Amount obtained by NGOs, number visible partnerships with NGOs and other organisations, reach and number of creations of movements and campaigns, high activeness of the NGOs advocacy	Document research Interview Communications between the WUC and the EU.
<b>Mobilizational structures (Expertise)</b>	Quality, reliability and novelty of information provided	If an NGO is the leading expert and primary information source for a specific issue, their voice will reach further	The NGO is able to provide broad and precise information on a particular and is a primary knowledge source on the subject.	Document research Communications between the WUC and the EU.

Table 2 – Operationalisation of the Theoretical Framework

## 3.5 INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL VALIDITY

### 3.4.1 EXTERNAL VALIDITY OF THIS RESEARCH

*External validity* refers, as McDonald (2005: 939) puts it, to “*the greater generalizability of the relationship between two concepts under study*”. In other words, external validity tests whether the study results can be used outside of the case in question. Considering that for this research there is a focus only on a single case, its external validity is limited. The most important flaw of single case studies is the uncertain possibility of generalization beyond the case in question. Since only one case will be studied, the case itself has been selected rather because of its contemporary relevance and substantive importance than for methodological purposes. Because of this, external validity is not assured unless one “*assumes absolute homogeneity of the population of cases and deterministic causal links*” (Toshkov 2016: 304). However very few scholars and researchers would be willing to make such a strong assumption “*as a result, the problem of (lacking) generalization looms large*” (Toshkov 2016: 304).

Unfortunately, this study is no exception. The results of this study will thus not lead to generalization of human rights’ NGO influence in the EU. It should however show how NGOs can approach and influence the agenda in regards to a human rights situation external to the EU despite there being so many economic and diplomatic interests involved. NGOs composed of a diaspora group, looking for a right of self-determination, for democracy, wanting the EU’s support and being at the crossroads of many interests may therefore find valuable information in this study. Indeed, a single case study will also allow for a more in-depth understanding of the process of influence and will enable us to explore more possibilities and more theories within one case. Each step of the agenda-setting process strategy set up by an NGO is studied individually and will allow for comparisons with the strategies or planned strategies of NGOs with similar claims and aims.

But importantly, a single case study, despite its lack of generalisability, allows a researcher to test and apply previous theories and research. This case is specific and fairly unique in its kind. An umbrella organisation that fights for the right of a single

minority in a country external to the EU, facing many diverging interests, is not a very common case. If theory were to diverge from what has been hypothesised so far, it would be in a case study such as this one.

### 3.4.2 INTERNAL VALIDITY OF THIS RESEARCH

*Internal validity* on the other hand refers to “*the robustness of the relationship of a concept to another internal to the research question under study*” (McDonald 2005: 939). When discussing internal validity one needs to think about how valid the measurements and the data is in regards to the correlation we are studying (McDonald 2005).

Interviewing is an important aspect of Case study research, and it is difficult to give full trust to an interview as people can change what they believe or perceive according to their own biases (Dür 2007). Furthermore, there is a caveat to the example provided by Toshkov (2016, 300) stating that through an interview we can obtain information that is not findable anywhere else. Indeed, because of that it is also sometimes difficult to triangulate data obtained through an interview as the information may not be corroborated anywhere else: not everything is made public at the EU. However, using multiple techniques to find correlation and to understand the strategies of NGOs, we will have a clearer and more reliable answer than if the study would rely only upon one methodology.

This studies' main strongpoint is the theoretical framework and all that derives from it. The framework has been made using a vast amount of research and peer-reviewed articles and each variable has been explained properly so as to make sure its existence within the framework is relevant both to the theory and to the research question. Moreover, each variable has been expressively operationalised in a clear and comprehensive way. This way, the analysis will focus on all elements that could possibly be used as part of the WUC's strategy. Each will be studied separately to give a global overview of the positive and missing points in its strategy. Although all available sources of data will be studied and each claim in the analysis will have to be

backed by several sources, full immersion in the EU to verify how things are happening is not possible. Therefore, all our data will be written recounts, an interview, process analysis and conclusions drawn thereof. Moreover, this research's main focus is on analysing the strategies used by the WUC and not so much the potential effect these strategies have on the international organisation. Although the level of influence may indirectly appear throughout the analysis when explaining certain effects of specific factors of advocacy and of influence.

# 4 – THE WORLD UYGHUR CONGRESS’ EU AGENDA-SETTING STRATEGY

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*This next step will be an analysis of the World Uyghur Congress’ strategy and actions for agenda-setting at the EU level with the help of data collected through media, the WUC website, an interview with the WUC’s policy coordinator at the EU level (ANNEX I) and all additional sources providing context and information on the WUC’s advocacy. All data collected will then be compared to the theoretical framework in order to find out how the Uyghur Congress’ advocacy compares to theory on successful advocacy and what can be improved.*

## 4.1 FRAMING

On the homepage of its website the World Uyghur Congress, states the goal of the organisation: *“The World Uyghur Congress strives to promote democracy, human rights and freedom for the Uyghur people through peaceful, nonviolent, and democratic means in order to determine their political future.”* The NGO also states that the WUC is active in raising Uyghur-related issues in a number of ways, this can mean that different issues can be presented in different ways. If this is done most efficiently, it that should lead to successful agenda setting. Considering that it is in general difficult for the EU to speak up about human rights in China, the framing strategy has to be particularly strong.

### 4.1.1 DIAGNOSTIC FRAMING

For a good strategy, an NGO needs to identify a problem and attribute blame or causality of that problem (Joachim 2007, 20) in a way that is relatable to the EU, causing



aggravation and the realisation that acting collectively can help solve the problem. Consequently, the terms used to identify the problem and the specific parts of the problem that are emphasized should vary in accordance to those that are being spoken to, in order to make it more relevant to them. From the data, the diagnostic framing can be separated in two groups: a broader general issue caused by China and specific issues where the EU can be blamed.

The main issue diagnosed in itself does usually not vary: it is simply the rights of the Uyghur people (labour rights, human rights, women's rights etc...) and the breaches of those rights by the Chinese government (WUC 2020 Human Right Report, December 2021 Newsletter, WUC Current Issues webpage...). On their website, the WUC states the current issues faced by the Uyghur people under five headers: political indoctrination camps, civil and political rights, economic social and cultural rights, counter-terrorism as well as the Urumqi Massacre. Most of them have been mentioned to the EU at some point (WUC 2021, UNPO 2018a 2018b), however not all issues are presented in a way that makes them relevant to the EUs policies: sometimes some elements seem to be mentioned with the sole goal of raising awareness but not create change. To reach the agenda, an issue has to be presented in a way that is aggravating. One interesting development in regards to the general issue is the recent use of the term "genocide". Previously the word was not used (Stoop 2021, WUC campaigns to the EU pre-2021), partially because of the heavy connotations of the word, making it less likely to have external actors with differing interests willing to cooperate since it would imply agreement with the term. However, since the publication of an independent report released by the Newlines Institute in March 2020 and an article by Zenz in July of the same year, both explaining why the situation of Muslims in the Xinjiang region qualifies as a genocide under the 1947 UN Genocide Convention, the Uyghur Congress has been pushing governmental actors as well as the EU to recognise the genocide. Another step taken towards that recognition has been setting up a tribunal, as many actors maintain that it is the role of a court of law to determine whether a genocide has or is indeed taking place (Stoop 2021, WUC 2021). The London based independent tribunal Uyghur Tribunal's judgment ruled that China committed

genocide against Uyghurs and other ethnic minorities in its western Xinjiang region in a judgement delivered by Sir Geoffrey Nice QC on the 10<sup>th</sup> of December 2021 (CNN 2021, Uyghur Tribunal 2021). This judgement should further legitimise the WUC claims to get the EU to recognise the situation as a genocide which confirms the theory of Princen (2007) stating that an NGO seeks and should seek to gain legitimacy for its claims. Gaining support from what one would usually consider to be reliable sources enhances the power of the diagnosis made by the NGO, and the term “genocide” causes more grievance than the mere idea of human right breaches.

In regards to relevance to the EU and the necessity to act collectively, the WUC seems to focus on the framing of more specific issues for which the EU is blameable and can act. Stoop (2021) indicated a current focus on advocacy to stop forced labour in the Uyghur region (De Rengerve & Stoop 2021, WUC 2021b, End Uyghur Forced Labour Coalition Nov. 2021) because of its relevance to current policies being enacted by the EU on due diligence. Stoop stated that they could talk about “*cultural destruction in the Uyghur region, which is of importance to them (the EU). But in terms of the practical things that you can actually do about it, there's less importance*”. In this case, the EU is blamed for the existence of companies economically profiting from forced labour in the Xinjiang region and not taking action to stop the import. Besides forced labour, the WUC also frames other issues by putting blame on the EU. For example, complicity, the enabling of the Uyghur genocide by silently partaking or being present at the Beijing Olympics, the lift of an arms embargo or the omission of a human rights clause from the discussion about the agreement and its final text of the EU-China Comprehensive Agreement on Investment are among the issues raised by the WUC. In general, the WUC applauds how vocal the EU can be, deplores the lack of actual action and advocates to bring more concrete measures on the EU's agenda.

#### 4.1.2 PROGNOSTIC FRAMING

The words and description of the issues used in the diagnosis of the problem and the description of the issues in the Xinjiang region has changed overtime, in accordance

with the evidence to support the term of “genocide” and with the relevance to the EU’s policy scopes and processes. Appropriately, the prognosis has changed.

The Congress takes a western liberal approach in its advocacy – an approach that is most frequently noted by international media (Chen 2014, 24). This approach advocates for a peaceful and democratic means to promote individual, political, and religious rights (Chen 2014, 24). Therefore, the solutions offered by the WUC will be in accordance to these values. This is supported by the fact they get their main funding from the National Endowment for Democracy NGO, an NGO funded by the US Congress, which gives out funding to those in accordance with those values (2021).

However, Stoop (2021) stated that offering solutions is not the main focus of the WUC. More often than not the WUC does not “*have the solutions because problems are so complex*”, therefore, he specified, recommendations are more likely to be given in order to stay as realistic as possible. This also visible in several joint letters that simply recommend and do not offer solutions to the problems (2019, 2021 ....). While this is undeniably a weakness if one wants to advocate for change, it also shows the commitment to advocacy that is appropriate to the EU institutions and not just general advocacy. Additionally, the WUC does realise that taking strong measures is a dangerous step for the EU to take economically speaking, and solutions are therefore formulated accordingly. In the exchange of views with the European Parliament subcommittee on human rights in May 2018 (UNPO 2018), Mr Isa called on the international community “*to – if it is not willing to take more decisive action – at least speak out to defend the basic principles of human rights, freedom and democracy in international institutions despite the Chinese pressure*”. However in the last year or so, during which speaking up has become more prevalent, the WUC has been advocating for more action.

Accordingly, Stoop also stated that following the recent positions and the actions taken by the USA “*the US provides concrete examples of what actions can be taken*” at the European level. For example, since the due diligence law is currently being discussed by the EU, the subject of forced labour and importation of products directly benefiting

from the forced labour of Uyghurs is one that the World Uyghur Congress and its affiliates advocate against heavily currently (Stoop 2021, Rengerve & Stoop 2021, Joint letter 9 Nov 2021). The Joint Letter to the European Commission of the 9<sup>th</sup> of November 2021 states provisions it presses the EU to include in the future EU Human Rights and Environmental Due Diligence and Corporate Accountability legislation

#### 4.1.3 MOTIVATIONAL FRAMING

Theory affirms that an NGO needs to motivate their advocacy using either moral or normative grounds and that it needs to make the EU's duty to act as clear as possible. The Chinese government has denied acting against fundamental rights and argue that the Uyghur crisis is an internal issue, of no concern to the international community. The government accused nations to use human rights as an excuse to interfere with China's domestic affairs (Bloomberg February 2021). Therefore, the necessity to offer strong reasons for the EU to act is amplified all the more.

Since the issue pertains the human rights of people outside of the EU, that are being targeted by their own government, it is important the WUC finds ways to make it relevant to the European Institutions. In the exchange of views meeting with the European Parliament in 2018, Dolkun Isa internationalised the repression faced by the Uyghurs by stating that *"Companies such as Apple and Airbnb have provided China access to the Uyghurs' data, making it easier for the Chinese government to extend its repressive grip. In Western universities, Chinese embassies are attempting to shut down academic conversations about Uyghurs, Tibet and other national groups by mobilising Chinese students through the Confucius Institutes."* (UNPO 2018).

As mentioned in the previous two framing processes, documental and interview data indicated that the World Uyghur Congress does in general not present the issue broadly to each actor within the EU or even to the EU in general. The WUC identifies the potential changes or actions the EU can take and frames it in a way that will make

sense to the EU institution in particular, to encourage them to listen. In theory, there are two main ways to motivate a plea: frame amplification and bridging.

Frame bridging was visible in the two first steps of the analysis of framing. It showed that the WUC focusses on the agenda setting of elements that are related to what the EU is working on in that specific point in time. Motivational framing is thus already done through the first steps of framing already. By offering solutions that would be accessible to the EU, the Uyghur Congress and other NGOs indirectly make it clear that the EU should act and address the issues. However, like Princen (2011) stated, the EU requires an additional, strengthened step in order for motivational framing to be successful.

There has to be a necessity to act on either moral or normative ground. In other words, there has to be frame amplification. It is therefore encouraging to note that there are several examples of frame amplification in the WUCs addresses to the EU. In their joint letter to the EU (HRW, 2019), the WUC and other NGOs expressly mention *“In order to affirm the EU’s foundational principle of promoting human rights”* when offering different recommendations in regards to the position the EU should take when discussing something with China. Both on normative and on moral grounds, in a open letter in 2021, the WUC and Coalition against forced labour mention that their claim is in accordance *“the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in its July 2021 recommendations to the European Commission”*. They also state that *“As the EU is China’s biggest trading partner, European businesses and consumers in particular are exposed to - and at times complicit in - these human rights abuses.”* In his speech to the subcommittee on human rights in 2017, the President of the WUC pled for the rights of Uyghur refugees in Europe with a normative argument, by mentioning the *“principle of the non-refoulement and 1951 International Refugees convention”*. In his article on Politico, while not directly addressing the EU, Isa, the leader of the WUC made a strong statement simply in the title *“Europe said ‘never again.’ Why is it silent on Uighur genocide?”* (2020). Thus, like was suggested as a possibility in the theoretical framework, he is taking a dramatic approach. If the EU does not act, things will become much worse.

#### 4.1.4. GENERAL FRAMING STRATEGY

As a whole, the framing strategy needs a focus on centrality, empirical credibility, experiential commensurability and narrative fidelity. By taking a western liberal approach (Chen 2014), the WUC appeals to the EU. By regularly mentioning the EU's human rights promotion, the WUCs approach has experiential commensurability. By communicating alone but also majorly through joint letters regrouping many more actors, the WUC gains empirical credibility and by maintaining the same general stance over the course of almost 20 years, the WUC has gained narrative fidelity and credibility. The framing steps are therefore done in accordance to what theory would describe as successful framing strategies, with the one weakness being offering recommendations instead of solutions. Since the WUC has been qualified as a leading NGO, the risk is that it may lose its identity (Murdie & Stroup 2012). Nevertheless, so far, besides perhaps the caution in offering solutions – which could possibly be related to a worry of being controversial – there is no evidence that suggests a sensible loss or even a change of the true identity of the WUC over the years.

## 4.2 POLITICAL OPPORTUNITY

### 4.2.1 ACCESS TO INSTITUTIONS

The advocacy of the WUC at the European level has gone from being outside to gaining access to the inside of the organisation. This is a soft switch in the openness of the EU. Accordingly, *“depending on the openness on the EU, you change your strategy like when it was closed. It was protests in front of the EU and now that it's more open you're actually inside.”* (Stoop 2021). The WUC has a lobbyist with EP accreditation since 2011 (EU Transparency Register 2021, Stoop 2021) and was given the opportunity to express itself at the Subcommittee on Human Rights (2017 & 2018).

There are many ways through which NGOs can influence the EU. Mr. Stoop explained that the WUC had mapped out their understanding of the different institutions within

the EU in order to figure where it would be best to approach depending on the specific claim. This means that active thought is put into the specific institutions within the EU that are picked in order to raise issues to the agenda and have more leverage. Stoop relegates the information he had received from the previous European Coordinator for the WUC *“I think the main ways in which we started doing our advocacy is first goal reaching out to the members of the European Parliament. As they are, you know, a bit more accessible, I'd say, than, for instance, the Commission or the External Action Service.”* (Stoop 2021).

The WUC addresses the EU in a plethora of ways. It attempts to influence the Council by advocating within EU Countries. Considering the WUC is an umbrella organisation, it has affiliates in numerous countries. Stoop (2021) indicated advocating himself at the Belgian Parliament for example. In the protest organised in 2021 in Paris by the WUC amongst others, direct statements aimed at the EU were made, with the presence of MEP Glücksmann. The Dutch affiliate submitted a recommendation in regards to the creation of a Dutch Uyghur Human Rights Bill (June 2020) and organised a protest in August 2020. Besides protests, the WUC also sends letters to Parliaments within the EU . Therefore, while the Council itself is closed to advocacy, the WUC is very active in influencing member states, and therefore indirectly the Council. The WUC and its affiliates are also active on social media, creating more awareness for the cause.

The WUC attempts to influence the EU Parliament by meeting, e-mailing and maintaining relationships with MEPs who are sympathetic to the Uyghur cause, are willing to raise the issue in Parliament and to support the WUCs activities in the institutions (Stoop 2021, WUC 2017). Stoop mentioned the easiness to contact MEPs as their contact details are readily available online. Carles Puigdemont i Casamajó for example mentioned that the WUC had urged the EU to take action at the *“Forced labour and the situation of the Uyghurs in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region Plenary Debate”* on 17<sup>th</sup> December 2020, which had many MEPs speaking out for the Uyghurs. While Puidgemont I Casamajo was the only MEP to mention the WUC, this

does not mean the other MEPs were not more or less influenced by the WUC. Stoop explained that the lack of mention of the actual Congress is due to the fact MEPs want to stay independent and not be formally associated to the NGO.

On its website, the WUC indicated that it is not engaging as much with the Commission or the EEAS despite acknowledging the importance for advocacy and for *“achieving recognition of human rights violations against Uyghurs”* (WUC 2017). This is a slight paradox in itself. As far as visible advocacy goes, several joint letters are directed at the Commission (WUC 2018, The Coalition to End Forced Labour in the Uyghur Region 2021), usually in the wake of events involving China. Stoop also indicated communicating with the Commission and the EEAS. Moreover, despite stating there was not as much engagement with the Commission, the WUC affirmed representatives from the WUC regularly meet Commission and EEAS officials to brief them on pressing situations facing the Uyghurs in the Xinjiang region (2017). It is unfortunately impossible to confirm or disconfirm this statement as there is no publicly available data in that regard.

#### 4.2.2 ALLIES

We accomplish more together than alone, but when talking of allies, one must also think of enemies who hinder the reach of a group’s advocacy. In this case the Chinese government can be considered as an enemy to the WUC advocacy. The WUC is also constantly faced with countering claims made by the Chinese Government. As an illustration, while the WUC claims that the demonstrations in 2009 were peaceful, but that a brutal government crackdown led to rioting. Beijing on the other hand claims that the bloody Xinjiang rioting was the result of a premeditated WUC plot (Chen 2014, 115).

Because of this, the EU finds itself on a crossroad between the US and China in all decision making that regards human rights in China. More elaboration on this can be found in the next chapter of the analysis. The WUC therefore needs allies with a countering voice that holds enough weight to influence the external agenda-setting of



the EU. Considering the WUC is an NGO advocating for the rights of one group, their reach will always remain limited; this is why it is important they ally themselves to others both inside and outside of the EU. Allies encompass a vast spectrum of actors, from states to individuals, including other NGOs.

Externally, having different states enforce policies protecting the Uyghurs will give Uyghur advocates more allies, often of great power, to bring certain issues to the European agenda, like stated previously in regards to the European Council. *“You're trying to accomplish something at the European Union. Sometimes it's easier to accomplish this specific thing in a European Union Member State first, because then you can go to the European Union with this specific accomplishment and say, OK, well, you know one of your Member States has done this.”* (Stoop 2021). For example, the city of Bordeaux, France, blocked the expansion of a Zara store due to the fact the affiliated company benefits from Uyghur labour. This shows concrete action is feasible in regards to the claims of the Coalition against forced labour in the Uyghur region. Other examples are the government of the Netherlands in February 2021, the government of Lithuania in April 2021 and the government of Belgium and the Czech Republic in June 2021, recognise the treatment of the Uyghurs by the Chinese government as a genocide. These affirmations all help the WUC in its advocacy and justify its use of the term genocide. Having big NGOs raising awareness to the WUC actions such as, for example, the International Federation for Human Rights, promoting the protests organised by the Uyghur Congress on their website (FIDH 2019), and associating with other small and big NGOs to organise joint campaigns is also helpful for the WUC (FIDH 2019, Joint Letter 2019, #ResistChina)

The WUC is part of the steering committee of the End Uyghur Forced Labour Coalition and a co-signatory of many joint statements and letters to the EU. This allyship was created outside of the EU but also profits within the EU: NGOs that are part of the coalition sometimes get to speak at a higher level than the WUC would. For example, both the head of the Human Rights in China NGO and of the Clean Clothes Campaign got to speak at the EU NGO-Human Rights forum in 2020.

Internally, within the EU institutions, the WUC works together with the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organisation. Together with the UNPO they formed a Uyghur friendship group in October 2017. This group was intended as a network of action to organise conferences on specific human rights violations against Uyghurs and to attempt raising greater awareness of the situation of the Uyghur people within the EU institutions (EU Transparency Register 2021). The WUC also finds support from MEPs (Plenary Debate 17<sup>th</sup> Dec 2020). However, as mentioned in the analysis of the previous variable, MEPs do not necessarily mention the WUC, and Stoop also stated (2021) that they are not the most reliable partners as they have their own interests. Thus, having allies is a great thing. Even if in a lot of cases they are unlikely to mention NGOs actively and may have other priorities and as a consequence will not constantly advocate along with the WUC. Therefore, it is important not to rely on one single type of ally. While allies are definitely good for the cause, they may not necessarily be pillars of support for the organisation nor are they always reliable.

The Uyghur Congress probably finds the most important allyship in other NGOs. This is visible through the creation of a Coalition external to the EU (Coalition to End Forced Labour in the Uyghur Region), of a worldwide campaign (#ResistChina) of a friendship group within the EU and through the writing of several joint letters (2018, 2019, 2021) addressed to the EU. Interestingly, the WUC also seems to realise the power that lays in support from powerful allies. For example, in the promotion of the 2018 Joint letter for the release of several political prisoners on its website, the WUC highlights twice that Amnesty international was also a signatory and while Amnesty has also written letters to the EU on its own in regards to the Uyghurs (Oct 2018), the WUC has not.

#### 4.2.3 POLITICAL ALIGNMENT

Political alignment goes hand in hand with allies, in the sense that if the allies of the WUC are part of the general political alignment of the EU, the issues they raise are far more likely to reach the higher agenda. Indeed, political alignments can create windows of opportunity (Kingdon 2007, Howlett et al., 2011) However, while NGOs have an active role to play in obtaining allies, they have no choice but to be more passive in regards to political alignment. Networking and obtaining allies obviously influences political alignment if those allies are politically involved, however the alignment itself is beyond the NGOs control. Literature suggests that in order to pull its luck, an NGO should be aware of and take into account the political alignments and crisis faced by the organisation. This includes the elections affecting the organisations as well as the political dynamics.

As stated earlier, the WUC finds itself at the centre of the China-US tensions, in which the EU has been very cautious to avoid facing similar consequences to what Australia faced after it sanctioned China by itself (Vaswani 2021). However, as the the US has been taking serious actions, along with the UK and Canada, to denounce the human rights situation, the EU becomes more open. Moreover, the countersanctions implemented by China against individuals, including MEPs, can work in the WUCs favour as it could potentially show that China is not a reliable trade partner. Since after those countersanctions, the EU stated not wanting to sign the trade agreement, it proves the drop of the weight of economic interests, potentially in favour of human rights ones.

A risk of alignment, depending on who one aligns with, is that it leaves open for loss of credibility, a very important aspect according to Princen (2007). While the alignment with the US opens up for more criticism from the Chinese government in many regards, Stoop has noticed that the alignment with the US has been beneficial in the context of EU advocacy: *"I think the European Union has been unwilling to do something because of the European Union's economic interests. But I think especially from the past two years, also since the United States has taken a very firm stance against China, the European Union has been in itself also bit more, uh you know, critical of China"*. While no source

officially states that this is the case, it is fairly clear that the strong position of the US against China's policies in the Xinjiang region starting in 2019, as well as the banning of all cotton and tomatoes of the Xinjiang region by the Trump administration in January 2021 had a trickling effect on the EU. True action by the EU was first taken in 2021, to which China responded with countermeasures. This jeopardised the agreement process that started in December 2021, but proves to the WUC that the EU is politically aligning with them, giving great opportunities for further agenda-setting.

While the US is a somewhat controversial ally considering the current situation in world politics, there are also other governmental actors that can on the other hand be of great value to the WUC. Stoop declared directly feeling the effect of elections. He noticed actors looking for certain elements to favour them in their political endeavours. He also stated that the WUC closely follows the German elections and political changes in Germany (Stoop 2021, WUC 2021i) as their outcome has a sensible effect on the EU (Issabeyava 2021, Lehne 2012)

However, since 2020, more actions have been taken by the EU, therefore the organisation as a whole is starting to align itself with the WUC and this offers great room for advocacy and agenda-setting opportunity by the WUC.

## 4.3 MOBILIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

### 4.3.1 ENTREPRENEURSHIP

It has only been within the past few years that the Uyghur Congress has gained true recognition and that the Uyghur cause has only been part of the European agenda. Stoop states the WUC has increasingly and consistently tried to establish itself in the European environment. According to the interviewee, the rise of attention may certainly be caused by several political and situational circumstances. However, it should also be partially attributed to the organised and maintained advocacy of the Uyghur Congress for the past 20 years, ever since its establishing in 2004. Starting off with protests organised in front of the EU buildings, the WUC is now being able to

communicate to actors directly from within the organisation, while still continuing the protests (FIDH 2019, WUC 2021). The Uyghur Congress has thus mobilized and maintained knowledge, motivation, campaigns and actions throughout the years which has eventually led to more influence –influence that went from passive to active communication with EU actors.

Indeed, today the Uyghur Congress is being described as “an international voice of the Uyghur people of Central Asia” (Documents on Democracy 2021) and a leading organisation in the Uyghur lobby with a large network (Chen 2014). This implies that it has shown consequential entrepreneurial abilities. The President of the Congress has also shown substantive entrepreneurship by serving as president of the WUC but also spending some time as vice-president at the Unrepresented Peoples and Nations Organisation. He therefore extended the WUCs reach in the EU as the UNPO is also an accredited lobbyist.

Being an umbrella organisation, the WUC brings together the voices of Uyghur organisations from all around the world. Stoop stated that as “*an umbrella organization, we're connected to organizations worldwide and these organizations are connected to the local Uyghur communities there. For instance, our official affiliate organization here in Belgium is connected to the community here in Belgium.*” As a consequence of the existence of affiliates, the advocacy happens at the international level through the main WUC and at the domestic level through the affiliates. The WUC communicates with the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, the US Congress, the Belgian Parliament, Amnesty International, the Australian Parliament etc. (Chen 2014, Vice News 2018; Stoop 2020), They organise protests in the EU, including in Germany (WUC Weekly Brief 30 July 2021), Paris (WUC 4 October 2021) and Brussels (Weekly Brief 2 October 2020). The WUC is part of the Resist China campaign with all its affiliates and other NGOs fighting for the rights of minorities in China (resistchina.org). Each affiliate organises protests as part of the campaign in their respective countries around the world and attempts to influence the agenda of the government of the country they are established in (Association des Uyghurs de France, Free Uyghur, Uyghur Association of Victoria,

Australia...). Through this formation, the WUC therefore establishes a broad network of advocacy and has the power to influence the EU from above and from below. This variable of successful agenda setting is closely interlinked with that of allies. Through the advocacy at the domestic level, the WUC creates policy change within governments. The more policy changes are achieved in different countries, the more chances of those policies reaching the EU agenda. In this respect, entrepreneurship is done right.

Aimed directly at the EU, the WUC organised from within as part of the Uyghur Friendship group a high-level event entitled "A People Under Threat: Hundreds of Thousands of Uyghurs Arbitrarily Detained in China". The WUC also writes articles addressing the EU and giving recommendations through European newspapers such as Euractiv (Nov 2021) and Politico (Sept 2020).

One thing is certain: the WUC is entrepreneurial and active on all fronts. Another example of thorough advocacy is the current ongoing campaign to get leaders to boycott the Beijing Olympics: a letter was sent out to all states (WUC 2021) one was sent out to all leaders at the European Union (WUC 2021) and one to global broadcasting agencies (WUC 2021).

An approximate of between 25,000 - 49,999 € are spent each year for EU advocacy (EU Transparency Register 2021), compared to bigger human rights NGOs such as Amnesty or Human Rights Watch this is very limited (EU Transparency Register 2021). It does make sense however since the WUC only focusses on one specific issue. One flaw in the entrepreneurship of the WUC attracts some criticism: the only known source of financial support is the National Endowment for Democracy, a slightly controversial American NGO (O'Rourke 2018), which awarded USD 380,000 to the WUC in 2019 (NED 2021). The funding of the NED itself comes mainly from the US Congress (Hong & Song 2014). The WUC is nonetheless capable of obtaining sufficient funds for its advocacy. However, the lack of transparency of the funding of the WUC is also rather problematic. By making the WUC less independent and neutral and an

easier target for criticism, the credibility of the organisation, which is an extremely important aspect to EU advocacy, according to Princen (2007), is slightly lowered.

While initially most networking and advocacy actions had to come from the WUC, today the NGO also gets asked for input and participation in campaigns. Stoop (2021) stated for example that *“by now we also get requests from other organizations, like leading human rights organizations, if we want to join an action. Just an example, for instance, Human Rights Watch.”* (Stoop 2021). This means that the WUC has established itself as a leading actor. Consequentially it does not to not always have to be the entrepreneur of campaigns for the Uyghurs. This positive evolution can possibly also be attributed to the Uyghur Congress’ expertise.

#### 4.3.2 EXPERTISE

Often at any point of the process (although we focus on agenda setting here), the World Uyghur Congress is the primary source consulted by the EU when wishing to raise a point or to accomplish something in regards to the Uyghurs (Stoop 2021). This seems to be mainly true for the DROI, the institution of the EU that is most active in understanding the conflict in the Xinjiang region and publishing its encounters with the WUC (DROI 2011, UNPO 2017, DROI 2018). This is proof that the WUC holds legitimacy in clarifying and providing information on the conflict. While stating that *“information from the Uyghur region is as good as impossible to get”*, the EU coordinator for the WUC explains that the main knowledge strength of the Congress is that most of its members can explain the crisis from a personal perspective.

This information cannot be verified any further. Besides the fact that the EU has given the WUC the opportunity to lobby from within the institution, the names of NGOs are rarely or never mentioned when an issue is truly being addressed (Stoop 2021, EP resolution of 17 December 2020...). However, the fact that they have been given direct access to the institution shows that the EU believes in their legitimacy, and legitimacy is most likely obtained thanks to expertise. On their website, the Uyghur Congress not

only provides reports published by themselves but also by the Uyghur Human Rights Project specifically. Again, this is where their position as an umbrella organisation comes into play. They re-publish articles and post referrals to research from different sources so that their website provides a clear overview of all available information on the Uyghur crisis. Their website thus acts as an umbrella for all relevant expertise relating to Uyghurs. This is for example the case with the Amnesty International report on surveillance technology (2020) and the HRW report “Break Their Lineage, Break Their Roots” (2021) or the World Uyghur Congress annual report on the Human Rights Situation in East Turkestan (2021).

The interview revealed the power of having one specific group defending their own cause (Stoop 2021). Individual actors within an IO are more likely to be emotionally affected and feel compelled to act or to voice someone’s pain when they are confronted with someone who went through the hardships the NGO is specifically fighting against. Stoop explained always trying to involve Uyghurs in his advocacy, this is translated into the fact that all official meetings between the DROI the WUC are actually meetings with the representatives of the organisation who are Uyghurs themselves (DROI 2011, DROI 2018, DROI 2017). On the other hand, the interviewee also indicated that NGOs with big names, such as Human Rights Watch will reach out to the Uyghur Congress specifically if they want to campaign for Uyghur rights because collaborating with individuals who have direct ties and experiences reinforces their statements and campaigns.

Nonetheless, it important to note that the WUC does not provide expansive expertise on its own. Most of its strengths lies in its pathos, the emotional part and the first-hand recounts of knowledge and experiences (Stoop 2021). It then backs its statements with research from other organisations and academia. While this is perfectly understandable since the NGO has limited resources, it also limits the chances of being influential. The WUC networking is very strong as the previous analysis has shown and backing statements with exterior sources shows less bias. However, if the EU needs information on a specific subject that simply requires expertise on human rights



in China, it does not seem that the WUC is the first one on the list (EU-NGO Forum 2020). This takes away an opportunity for a bigger platform for the WUC to advocate on.

#### 4.4 GENERAL ANALYSIS

While the first step of this analysis is centred on what the WUC does, when it comes to political opportunity and mobilizational structures, more external and passive factors enter into play, adding more importance to what the EU and other external actors may offer to enhance the strategies created by the WUC. This shows the limitations of influence of an NGO despite its highest efforts. External interests and influences play a very heavy role in the openness of the EU to the claims of an NGO. So, while advocating at the EU is important, it is as, if not more, important for an NGO to also advocate elsewhere both domestically and internationally.

As a whole, the WUC has gained more and more access into EU institutions. To do that, according to Princen (2011), it had to build credibility and gain attention. As Stoop pointed out, the advocacy of the World Uyghur Congress has been going on for almost twenty years. It started with protests in front of the EU buildings and has now reached the point where the Congress is able to lobby directly inside of the institution. Now, actors attached to the EU directly involve the Uyghur Congress or reach out for further information on issues regarding the Muslim community in the Xinjiang region (EU Transparency Register 2021, Stoop 2021). Thus, strategies have changed and have been adapted depending on the possibilities that were offered to the NGOs. These possibilities were created thanks to the maintained advocacy since 2004 (WUC 2004, 2017, Stoop 2021), to the rise of global awareness on Uyghur issues and to the firmer stance of the US on China's human rights infringements, encouraging the EU to do the same.

One general statement can be made on the WUC agenda-setting strategy at the EU: it does not seek to be fully self-sufficient. It seems that the WUCs strategy limitations are almost voluntary. Or at the very least they are the consequence of limited resources. It does not seek to fulfil a role for Uyghur advocacy on every front and the power it draws from networking is visible in every step of the analysis (Stoop 2021, UNPO 2018, Chen 2014, WUC 2019, Turkmenistan Times 2017). The WUC does not pretend to bring scientific expertise and mainly focusses on having first hand experiences (UNPO 2018). By doing so, it limits its reach but at the same time has an anchored role within a broader human rights advocacy lobbying at the EU. In the case of human rights advocacy, having first-hand experience and stories enhances legitimacy. To make use of that legitimacy, the WUC has empowered itself not so much through additional expertise or resources, but through the use of networking and the creation of an expansive network of support and allies.

The WUC's EU strategy proceeds in accordance with the general advocacy of the Uyghur Congress. It should be seen as a sub-strategy to the global strategy of the Congress and reflects the advocacy of the rest of the organisation (WUC 2017, WUC 2021b), correspondingly to what was found out by Murdie and Stroup (2012). Indeed, similar actions undertaken by the WUC at the EU level are undertaken at governmental level and at the EU (Chen 2014, WUC weekly brief July 2021).

The one danger Murdie and Stroup (2012) discovered was the danger for an NGO becoming a leading NGO and gaining easier access the organisation towards which it aims its advocacy, to become more cautious in its advocacy. While since 2004 nothing indicates that the WUC has taken a softer approach, its overall approach since the beginning has never been too controversial. But while remaining outside of controversy, the WUC still does not fear to call out the EU for lack of action (Isa 2020, End Uyghur Forced Labour Coalition 2021...)



## 5 – CONCLUSION

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The aim of this study was to set up a theoretical framework corresponding to successful agenda-setting strategies at the EU, test its applicability and apply the framework to a real-life case. The framework showed the importance of several factors to make the most of windows of opportunity.

The World Uyghur Congress' actions concur majorly with what is expected of good advocacy, and the opportunities are slowly turning in its favour as well, which should create greater prospects of agenda-setting. The data collected on the WUC's strategy also fitted within the framework, showing that the framework is consistent with reality. Each step of the strategy process is important in its own way and the framework should be applicable to NGOs with similar claims to that of the WUC, wishing to set up an EU strategy. The case study shows that a combination of all variables is truly necessary for a good strategy that aims to influence the EU process. The framework is therefore applicable to a real case study.

In response to the question of how the World Uyghur Congress influences the agenda-setting of the EU, several statements can be made. The main focus of the WUC is networking. The NGO frames the issue in a way that to them seems appropriate to the EU, networks a lot on all levels to get the most out of political opportunities and uses those political opportunities. In the interview, Stoop noted that the emotions and the

first-hand recounts of the Uyghur members of the organisation have more influential power than those of someone also working for the Congress but not having been directly impacted by the cause they fight for. This adds a big emotional aspect to advocacy, an aspect that will probably be more recurrent within human rights related situations than within other areas. This emotional side seems incredibly important to add weight for a cause so far removed and. It is the main component of the WUCs strategy and an important factor for influence. When there is a lack of resources, the passion, drive and emotions related to having experienced something first hand are a force of agenda-setting power. In a nutshell, what is mainly missing from theory is the pathos (Aristotle) as it is mainly focussed on ethos as a source of influence. While it is very difficult to confirm or disconfirm the impact of the pathos of the WUC, by appealing through emotions it is an important factor that should be taken into account in further studies, it is also where most of the WUCs legitimacy lies.

The key takeaways from the analysis of their strategies are that overall, the WUC's advocacy strategy at the EU seems complete.

Its strength lies in:

- Its networking and cooperation leading to powerful allies.
- Its western liberal approach in framing.
- Its first-hand testimonies and focus on a single cause.

Its main weaknesses are:

- Its limited prognostic framing. While this is due to the nature of the problem, it still weakens the claims by weakening the potential effects of the agenda-setting prospects.
- Its limited new scientific research.

Circumstances exterior to the WUC have created windows of opportunity within the EU and the WUC's preparation has allowed the NGO to make use of those windows.

As a whole, the data suggest than more so than not, the WUC's agenda-setting strategy at the EU is a successful one. Our research does not evaluate the level of success but only the potential for success in agenda setting. However, considering the theoretical

framework contained the variables that have all been confirmed numerous times as contributors to successful agenda setting and considering the WUC act upon all the variables, there is little more the NGO can do, except maintaining its effort and attempting to find stronger solutions to the problems. The one thing that seems to be missing from theory when analysing the data is the emotional aspect of human rights agenda setting and the power of first-hand experience testimonials.

The study has its limitations: external politics in the EU are not the most transparent and it is therefore impossible to know everything. Another limitation is the fact that Koen Stoop, despite playing the biggest role in the Congress' EU strategy, and despite providing information on the actions of his predecessors, he has only joined the Congress a bit over a year ago.

Following this in-depth analysis of Uyghur advocacy within the EU by NGOs, several conclusions can be reached. Scholars have dissected and found the right steps and elements that are used in NGO strategies to exert influence. There is a great variety of factors that play more or less of a role depending on the subject of advocacy. The Theoretical Framework aligns with reality and despite the prediction that different factors would overlap in the analysis, it was still possible to dissociate between all elements of the framework that are used or are influential on the NGOs capacity for advocacy. There is also a likely difference in agenda-setting influence strategies depending on the type of human right NGOs which merits further attention. There might be a difference in agenda-setting strategies depending on whether the NGO treats a variety of issues or works specifically for community or a problem.

The ambition of agenda-setting will thus depend on the NGOs in question, but a general consensus can definitely be found with the framing theories. While theories explain that the three types of framing overlap - which is true - the distinction remains very much possible between the three steps. This is especially visible when one choses to focus solely on the EU while looking at an NGO which advocacy happens at

multiple international organisations. The contrast in advocacy on different levels shows the existence of a real strategy proper to each organisation.

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## ANNEX I – INTERVIEW

WITH KOEN STOOP, EU POLICY COORDINATOR FOR THE WORLD UYGHUR  
CONGRESS (2 November 2021)

Raha Sayadifar (R): So, my first big question is do you feel like you have like a conscious strategy in influencing the EU? Is there like a “This is how we present this, this is the people we need to talk to this. Do you like have a strategy?

Koen Stoop (K): Uhm, I think if you can look at it from different angles. I think if you look at the broader strategy that we have, of course we have one. You know we have long term strategies of certain things that we want to achieve at the European Union. Uh, and of course, before we do implement this broader strategy, we look at the actors that we need to approach. We look at, you know, which institutions in the European Union are important to reach out to and like which institutions can make a difference because the EU is very complicated. Yeah, I guess you've studied this in your thesis. The different institutions each have their own thing that they're doing so for us it's. Yeah, it's important to kind of map out who does what. Who can we approach and what can we ask for what? What I think more importantly so for our broader strategy, we always, you know have in mind the institution that we want to reach out to. Yeah, like in this broader strategy, we don't really pick one or two institutions. I think any institution that wants to listen to us is more than welcome, as each of them have, you know, their own. You know special areas, but then of course for may be very specific topics like Uyghur forced labour for instance, which is which is an issue that that I personally I'm working a lot on there. Maybe the European Commission is bit better suited as they are like the legislative institution. So yes, I'd say in a broad sense, of course, we always map out who to approach. But sometimes when it comes to very specific actions, very specific questions that we have, there are others institutions that we approach individually.

R: Okay so I'm going to get a bit more specific because you frame for example the issue like you said. For example, you talk about forced labour, is that because it is to you the main issue or is it also because maybe the EU is more likely to listen to something on that subject whereas they wouldn't really listen to something else.

K: I think you're definitely right, and I think it's a mix again of, on the one hand our own priorities, because you know, while Uyghur forced labour is not the only thing in the Uyghur crisis. You know there's dozens of topics that I can speak on with the European Union, but at the same time, if we look at it like practically, we also want to make sure that what we tell the European Union is actually something they can deal with.

R: Yes

K: For instance, we can. We can talk to European Union about the, you know, cultural destruction in the Uyghur region, which is of importance to them. But in terms of the

practical things that the EU can actually do about it, there's less. There's less importance I guess for them also. And as we have limited time speaking to the European Union, we have to kind of pick the issues that we think are the most important to them. And I think Uyghur forced labour is definitely, probably the most relevant right now. As you might have noticed, the European Union is working very hard on so called due diligence legislation. It's for companies to make it mandatory to make sure they don't contribute to human rights abuses in their supply chains.

R: Yes.

K: Just a while ago, Von der Leyen, she announced that she would be working on a mechanism to ban imports made with forced labour so you can also see through the communications that the EU has that forced labour is an issue that is very high on their agenda. And also in our communications with the EU, it has always been something that they're very concerned about. Also, because it reaches the European Union because products made by Uyghur forced labour end up on the European Union market, and as the EU is very proud of its, you know, values and norms etc. It is something that it can also do concretely something about like they want at the one hand of course to help Uyghurs, but I guess equally important is the fact that it wants to make sure that European consumers do not you know, buy products made with Uyghur forced labour and I guess also internationally. It's a big thing, the United States has been very active on this, so it's also easier to kind of coordinate this with other countries.

R: Yes okay. And do you present the solutions to your problem when you talk about them?

K: Uh, always, yes always. I mean, more recommendations because even us don't always have the solutions because problems are so complex. But yeah, essential to our advocacy are of course the recommendations because we can explain to them the situation but, yes, advocacy is all about urging someone to do something.

R: Yes

K: And yeah, I guess we are in a better position than sometimes them to, especially from Uyghur perspective because we're an Uyghur run organization. I'm one of the few ones whose is not Uyghur. Uh, so I think, especially if sometimes I do advocacy with Uyghur colleagues. You know, putting a human face to the crisis. Yeah, but in the end, it's all about recommendations and following up on those.

R: Yes, okay, and also just making it clear that the EU has to do something like there has to do something like there. It's also their role to do something about it specifically.

K: Oh absolutely yeah

R: Yes, Okay. So now I'm going to switch to a different type questions which is more about like the political opportunities the EU gives you to actually have your voice heard. Because like clearly you do make the efforts to have answers ready for them. So my question is, do you know through which routes, within the EU, you are more likely to have your voice heard? Get influence within the EU? Because there's so many different ways, like the Subcommittee Committee for Human Rights. Is there like a specific way or even through politicians or three states that will then talk to the EU?

K: Uhm, I think one of the main ways indeed, I think one of the main ways, because we've been doing this for, you know for years.

R: Yes

K: For instance, I haven't set up yet for advocacy here, like I joined only a year ago and my colleague before me has really set up the EU's advocacy. But from what I understand from him is that I think the main ways in which we started doing our advocacy is first of all reaching out to the members of the European Parliament. As they are, you know, a bit more accessible. I'd say, than, for instance, the Commission or the External Action Service. So yeah, I I would say MEPs quite accessible in this sense so. You know their contact information is easy to find and you can just send them an email explaining the situation and asking for a meeting. And of course, uh. It has become easier over the past years to reach them as the Uyghur crisis has really caught the global attention.

R: Yes yes

K: Uhm, but I think one of them more accessible ways is talking to the talking to members of the European Parliament and then indeed because there are so many MEPs, it is from our perspective most interesting to focus on. Indeed, the Subcommittee on Human Rights or the Committee on Foreign Affairs.

R: Okay

K: Also depending on the situation. But what I found is that really the MEPs that are of course interested in human rights are often part of these groups, so they are also more willing to listen to you. So you always have to kind of figure out you know also the interests of the enemy of these MEP's and also their political groups. Because some political groups are a bit more, for instance is the Greens are very open. Take a very firm stance on human rights, whereas for instance ID has as a political group, has traditionally enjoyed a bit more closer ties with China or their MEPs I should say so. It's also important to kinda yes from MEP to MEP, which side of the political spectrum they're on as they've also had, you know there's so many different opinions and we also had meetings where we met with someone who was on the far right. Like the more the populist political party, which was not constructive at all like they were not interested and willing to listen to us. They had more so the opinion that you know

Uyghurs because they're muslim are terrorists. So you really have to. Yeah, again, like do some stakeholder mapping like exactly who these MEPs are.

R: Aha, yeah

K: Uhm, at the same time, well I think that the European Parliament is maybe a bit more accessible. As we grew in our advocacy, we also. Yeah, we also reached the other. We've sealed institutions, for instance. I'm in regular contact with the external action Service and they also take very concrete interests in the Uyghur crisis and you know specifically when, for instance, there are Uyghurs abroad who are at risk of being deported, we can ask the external action service to check with their colleagues in the country if they can do something. So, it's a very broad perspective of that one hand doing advocacy, sometimes asking the EU for help in certain cases. But I think in advocacy like the really the more accessible step is this European Parliament and also through them you can you know, expand your network.

R: So then, do you ever change your framing up like the problem depending on which Member of Parliament you talk to?

K: Not really. We, as an organization of course, have you know, a certain opinion on the crisis, so I wouldn't necessarily say that we frame it differently. But maybe our asks might be different of certain MEPs, for instance the people that are specifically in the Human Rights Subcommittee could work on certain specific cases. For instance, you have the group against interference in the democratic process in the EU, which is a very specific subtopic, of course of how China is trying to also repress Uyghurs in Europe. It's also yeah depending on the MEP I wouldn't say we frame our asks differently, but maybe our asks themselves are different depending on the Member.

R: I see, and yes, and so for example, do you feel like once you get the support of a fairly important MEP, you can get through to the other parts of the EU, like for example with Raphaël Glucksmann's speech, did that open more doors for you. within the EU. The fact that he spoke up about it?

K: I guess it's in some way, but not very openly. I'd say, of course he's very outspoken on the Uyghur crisis. Yeah, one of our most important supporters. But for instance in his speeches in parliament etc. Of course he doesn't mention the World Uyghur Congress by name.

R: Yeah, no he doesn't indeed.

K: I guess also that's the thing, like MEPs, also need to retain their independence from organizations. As you know, you can't say OK, and I mean an MEP and I'm linked to XYZ organization.

R: Yeah yeah.

K: Um, but definitely, if you talk to any MEP, if you ask them, do you know any other people within your party or within the European Parliament that might be interested in talking to us? You know, they could refer us to new MEPs or sometimes they, you know, have contacts within the Commission or in other in other parts.

R: Okay so it's a lot of networking yes.

K: Yeah exactly, it's like it's yeah it's like especially Glücksmann of course, has been you know very vocal. So their offices are also updated on I guess more internal European Union debates. So for instance, last week I had a chat within their offices and then I can also ask, you know how's the Commission doing in its legislative proposal with the proposal for due diligence. As of course they are within the European Union, so they are a bit more aware of, you know, the internal happenings there. So I guess aside from networking they always know people to reach out to. It's also in terms of information that you get from.

R: Yes. So do you feel like the EU also goes looking for what you have to offer? Or do you have to be more proactive and really go seek it out?

K: Uhm, I think nowadays we do get some requests, not necessarily from, I guess the European Union itself, I think in general, because there's so many NGOs that are asking for the attention of the MEPs maybe not even, I think in here we're like the main Uyghur organization. So, I guess when it comes to initial contact, we have to be more proactive.

R: Mm

K: But if it's any for any information that they wish afterwards, or if there's any specific action they would like to do in the European Parliament, then they you know like of course sometimes they reach out to us. But I think in general we have to be the proactive side of the two.

R: Yeah yeah, OK, and do you also feel like when, I mean you've been there for one year, but I don't know if you have an impression from that Uyghur Congress in general if the political stance of the EU. Like the EU Parliament changes after an election, for example, or one election is approaching or there's a crisis going on in EU. Do you feel a difference in how far you can get or how your voice can be heard?

K: Oh absolutely absolutely. I think, you know even though, you know MEPs, or the European Union in general might be supportive of your cause, like of course they are super concerned. Anyone we speak to says they're concerned and such but the in at the end, it's all political and especially China. There's so many geopolitical implications. The European Union has huge economic interests in China and these are not static. Neither is the human rights situation itself or the interest in China. Uhm, I think a trend that has been interesting to follow is exactly this. If you look at how the European Union has approached China, also politically because for a very long time

you know I think European Union has been unwilling to do something because of the European Union's economic interests. But I think especially from past two years. Also since the United States has taken a very firm stance against China, the European Union has been in itself also bit more, uh you know, critical of China. But the European Union is still very very careful around China.

R: Uh-huh, yes okay very safe.

K: But I think, if we talk about how things changed in the European Union, over very specific example that has been very interesting to follow is the sanctions. So, the European Union adopted sanctions against a few Chinese individuals and one entity in in March, specifically over their involvement in the in the Uyghur crisis. And this was really the first actual step that the European Union has taken in response to the Uyghur crisis. But I think China's reaction was interesting and in this sense, as it counter sanctioned different European individuals including MEPs. And this has really damaged the relationship between the European Union in China. Like really badly. So you could see that for instance European Parliament as a whole spoke out against these counter sanctions. They said immediately afterwards. OK, well, as long as these counter sanctions are in place, we will not ratify the EU- China investment agreement. Which was agreed upon in principle between the European Commission and China in December. But of course, it needs ratification from the European Parliament. So you really saw that you know after these counter-sanctions, the relations really went down and I think, also politically, I think the European Union saw that China is not a reliable partner to trade with or to even politically engage with. So, there's definitely been, even in the past year, some major involvements in the political stance of the European Union as well.

R: Yes, you can even see that the advocacy in the US influences the EU because they managed to influence the US's stance it comes to the EU and that helps your strategy plan.

K: Absolutely, absolutely. And I think I mean we, the World Congress is an umbrella organization, so we have a member organizations in various different countries, including in the US. So definitely their advocacy there is also helpful for us here, because, I think the US provides concrete examples of what actions can be taken. So it's always important to you know, not to look at the European Union as you know, a single entity that's standing alone.

R: Yes there's so many influences that you can impact right?

K: Exactly and the sanctions of March, they were done together with the US, Canada at UK. So it's always important to keep that in mind as well.

R: Yeah, so is it also, for example, sometimes France may say something against against China or another country in the EU and then that also impacts what the EU does I suppose?

K: Oh yeah, absolutely absolutely. Because at the end of the day, the EU, you know, you can see it as its own as I said, like a single entity, but in the end, it's made up of its Member States.

R: Yes

K: Uh, and this is the dynamic that is really really important. I think it's the main forces that also shapes our advocacy. Uhm, because right now Germany and France are two main players in in Europe. Uh, really shaping the EU is China policy, I think especially Germany is is is very influential in the EU's China policy. So anything that goes on in the EUs Member States in relation to China is also important to us, so we've closely followed elections in Germany. And also when it comes to trying to accomplish something in European Union, sometimes it's easier to accomplish this specific thing in a European Union Member State first, because then you can go to the European Union with this specific accomplishment and say, OK, well, you know you're one of your Member States has done this.

R: Uh-huh yes

K: For instance, in Belgium, I've been very busy also doing my advocacy with the Belgian Parliament. Trying to make them recognize the crisis as a genocide and we're trying to do this in different European countries as well, because the more EU countries that take this stance or that you know, speak out in a certain way, the easier gets for us to ask the European Union to, you know, take over this stance. So yes, definitely, Member States are a big part of our advocacy as well.

R: Yeah, it's really going everywhere and then finally hopefully reach the goal they, and you, want.

K: Yeah, yeah exactly. There's, there's a million ways to reach something, which doesn't always make it easy.

R: Yes okay. Perhaps a bit of an odd question now, but for example, you're not of Uyghur background yourself. Do you think that helps for the advocacy to have people within the organization from different backgrounds? Are you more likely to have people listening to you, if it's not just one specific group of people advocating for something?

K: I think in this case, it would actually be easier, I think for our advocacy, if I were Uyghur.

R: Okay.

K: But that's I guess only because we are a Uyghur organization. We talk about the Uyghur crisis. But if you, for instance, having organization like you know, Human Rights Watch or Amnesty, it's always good to have a diverse team and not only you



know Western Europeans or these kind of things, but I think for the World Congress, it's particularly important to have Uyghurs do advocacy because they themselves are the victims of this. Because I think it's important to understand that each Uyghur, or at least each Uyghur I know, has been personally impacted by China's policies, like they have family members still in a region or they have had to flee China, and I think especially this personal experience is crucial in advocacy.

R: Okay yes.

K: It's because I can, you know I know the situation. I can explain it really well, but what I do not have is this personal story, which is really impactful when it comes to advocacy. Because it's for I guess for politicians it's easy to ignore me. Easier to ignore me. Whereas if you talk face to face with an Uyghur...

R: The emotions are stronger?

K: Yes, you can, you can feel the emotions. It's very important in advocacy, so I always try to involve Uyghurs in my advocacy as well. For instance, the Uyghur community here in Belgium, or my colleagues who are elsewhere. But it's definitely a crucial part of our advocacy, but maybe that only goes because we're so specifically talking about the Uyghur case.

R: Yes okay. From my research, I've seen that the Uyghur Congress is the one organizing campaigns or writing letters that are then signed by others too. So a lot of advocacy comes from the Congress,

K: In Europe?

R: Yes, and do you feel strength from being the organizer of all these campaigns and then having other organisations backing you, for example Human Rights Watch or Amnesty?

K: Uhm, yes, no, I think again, I think our precision is not something that we had from day one. I mean we were established in 2004 and I think our EU advocacy has been going on since maybe 2011, 2012, something like this. And of course, at the beginning people don't know you and I think, especially during these initial years as an organization, it's important that the way you conduct your advocacy is you know, legitimate, that you base your advocacy on proper research, that you don't go about scream very extreme things. It is also important to position yourself within the European Union, with other NGOs in a legitimate way. You build trust and legitimacy over the years. So I think the position we are in now, being a leading organization, I guess worldwide. But especially in the European Union, where I think we're most active, yes the fact that we're in close contact with you know, Human Rights Watch and other groups, I think it's a result of you know, an effort of years to establish ourselves in this environment.

R: And does it strengthen your influence? Having all these organizations backing you?

K: Absolutely absolutely, because, you know, by now we also get requests from other organizations, like leading human rights organizations, if we want to join an action because just an example, Human Rights Watch, if they were to do an action on the Uyghur Crisis, of course their name is big, but it's also important for them to have supportive Uyghurs themselves.

R: Yes.

K: So I think that's one of the core strengths of our organization, it's that we're really able to bring the Uyghur voices and so yes, that definitely strengthens our organization. If we team up with Human Rights Watch or with other leading human rights organizations, it's definitely important.

R: Okay. So from all the things you have said so far, I guess one can assume you are the expert on Uyghurs, or your organization holds the main expertise, is the main source people go to. So, you would say that's one of the main assets of your organization? The expertise?

K: Yes absolutely. I mean not only our experience with advocacy but also our understanding of the Uyghur's people history, because there's a long history. The information from the Uyghur region is as good as impossible to get.

R: Uh-huh.

K: Yeah, I guess the fact that we are an Uyghur led organization that each of my colleagues can, as you know, explain from a personal perspective, the crisis, you know the language we have, because of as an umbrella organization, we're connected to organizations worldwide and these organizations are connected to the local Uyghur communities there. For instance, our official affiliate organization here in Belgium is connected to the community here in Belgium.

R: I see yes.

K: So for instance, if we want to do advocacy, in like more of a judicial setting, it's important to have witnesses who can testify about these things. So, we are also in a position that we are connected to other communities that we can find people that can speak on these things. I guess indeed, our main asset is being Uyghur, being connected to Uyghurs. Well as well as having this, you know, nearly 20 years of experience with this particular issue.

R: Yes, do you know or think that from the start they had this strategy of like slowly building up and thought through? Or was it just we want to defend this cause and that's it?

K: Uhm, I think like every organization, we've, you know, had different strategies also because we were established in 2004; no one really really cared so much about the Uyghurs. I mean, it was not on the agenda of the European Union or anything. But especially since you know 2016, 2017, when the news of the internment camps started coming out. We also have to adapt our strategy accordingly, I think.

R: Okay.

K: Yes, before that, it's more difficult to get your voice heard. So, you have to sometimes be a bit more public, with like demonstrations, protests in front of the European Union, whereas now it's much easier for us to just go talk to the European Union. I think, I guess it goes for any NGO that is trying to expand their network, expand their influence. And it gets easier, unfortunately the worse the situation gets. And you have to adopt your strategies accordingly.

R: Ah yes, so also depending on the openness of the EU, you change your strategy, like when it was closed, it was protests in front of the EU and now it's more open and you're actually inside.

K: Yes exactly.

R: Okay. So can you, maybe in a few points, say how you finally think you reached the agenda? What were the few catalytic factors that made you reach the EU agenda? That made the Uyghur problems being suddenly talked about happen?

K: I mean, I would like to think that it was also through our efforts and you know, persistent advocacy, like trying to continuously talk to these people. But I think, realistically, what really proved to be the change for us to be heard, is as I mentioned, the news of the concentration camps coming up. So there, of course reminded people so much of for instance the Holocaust.

R: So that was the media?

K: Yes, like media, researchers. And so, I think this news coming out, like really becoming international news, I guess it reached also through us, it reached MEPs because of course they saw this news. Of course we then immediately reached out to the European Union and so I guess it's a combination of you know, the situation itself that really developed itself, and well, our consistent advocacy.

R: Yes, and being ready to like, one its getting talked about, be prepared?

K: Yes absolutely yes.

R: Do you think the situation will get better?

K : That's such a difficult question to answer. China has not in any way acknowledged it is doing something wrong. If you ask you know, if I think something is going to change in China anytime soon, I don't think so. But that's something that we of course, in our advocacy, are a bit more optimistic about.

R: Yes, you have to be.

K: But personally, I doubt it. We've been asked this question also by politicians, like what can we concretely do to make the situation on the ground better? And my response often is, even though that's in the end, the goal, I think the only realistic thing that we can do now from the West is to make sure that we are not complicit in these human rights abuses. And that we pressure China into changing because in the end it's only China that can change what it is doing. And this, I doubt that it will end anytime soon. But I think the response from the international community is something that we can concretely change and that we can influence. Because China we cannot influence, like they try everything in their power to stop us from doing our work. So the only thing we can influence as an advocacy organization is the rest of the international community.

R: Yes yes. Okay, well thank you so much for answering all of my questions.

K: You're welcome.