

13 scenarios/steps of escalation formulated by the Iranian authorities most likely also include attacks on commercial targets (tankers, hydrocarbon industry facilities in the region). Such attacks would only strengthen Iran's isolation on the international arena and thus will remain an option of last resort.

As for Tehran's concerns about the internal security matters of its state, it might be assumed that in the near future terrorist attacks, acts of sabotage and various types of provocations are even more likely to occur than previously anticipated.

Stecol's operations in Poland

Łukasz Sarek

Stecol is a Chinese state-owned construction company that has been very active in recent years in the field of tenders for infrastructure projects in Poland. In 2018, the Chinese company has participated in several tenders: Cracow north outer ring; the section of the express road S7 from Rdzawka to Nowy Targ; Praszka and Gorzów Śląski outer ring; another section of S7 expressway between Załuski and Modlin and S1 expressway section Przybędza-Milówka. It has lost all those tenders due to incomplete documentation, incorrect or false information included in tender documents, procedural errors or higher bids comparing to competitors. The company has drawn conclusions from those failed attempts and in 2019 it has improved its operations in Poland. In result, it has won the tender for S14 section of Łódź outer ring and for Poland's key infrastructural rail construction project – the section of Rail Baltica from Czyżew to Białystok. Analysis of the Stecol's status and operations in Poland can lead to the following conclusions:

1. After first lost tenders, Stecol has improved its tender procedures and documentation by adjusting them to the Polish legal requirements. It was also very flexible in cooperation with local partners, entering in consortium agreements with its former competitor – Intercor. Stecol is a yet another company, along with Sinohydro and Pinggao, which has successfully entered the Polish market. They can serve as an example encouraging other Chinese companies to participate in tenders in Poland. It can be expected that more would follow the suit.

2. Stecol enters consortium agreements with other Chinese companies operating in the Polish market. In some tenders, it also competes with its Chinese counterparts. So far, there have been no proved cases of Stecol entering into project-sharing agreements, where it would collude with other Chinese companies to set the winning offers in tenders. However, it cooperates closely with Sinohydro, another member of the Power China group. Sinohydro's operations in other projects, e.g. in North Macedonia, Uganda, Ecuador, or Ghana, raised many controversies related to transparency, quality of works and corporate governance.

3. In several tenders, Stecol's offers were higher than the competitors, including both Polish local subsidiaries of foreign enterprises and companies from other countries such as Kazakhstan or Ukraine. It indicates that the Chinese company focuses on selected projects and does not strive to win every tender. It increases the credibility of Stecol's actions in Poland.

4. Stecol's cooperation with Polish enterprises within the consortium framework increases the Chinese company's knowledge and know-how of the Polish market, especially regarding such operations as tender documentation and procedures. They also help in building a network of subcontractors. It increases Stecol's ability to participate in tenders as a general contractor or a consortium leader, not a subcontractor. It also increases Stecol's competitive position compared to its Polish counterparts.

5. Evaluation of Stecol's projects in Poland regarding the purchase of Polish construction materials and employing Polish subcontractors can be made in the later phases or after the projects are completed. It should be, however, considered that the lower price offered by the Chinese company can be elusive if Stecol extensively uses Chinese materials or Chinese workers and makes significant relevant payments back to China as a result. It is also an element of the broader issue related to participation of non-EU companies in tenders in Poland.

6. As a state-owned enterprise, Stecol can be more easily used by the Chinese state administration or CPC to achieve their political or economic goals in comparison to those private enterprises that are less dependent on the central-level directives and oversight.

Stecol's status should be factored in while evaluating Chinese company's participation in key infrastructural projects in Poland.

7. So far, Stecol has not gained significant experience as an independent contractor in large road infrastructure projects abroad. The Chinese company has been so far operating in Africa and in Asian countries that are of different terrain and climate compared to Poland. It has also operated in environments with very different investment standards, which may not prove useful in the Polish context. Stecol has even less experience in rail infrastructure projects, which should be taken into consideration as the construction of the rail line within the Rail Baltica framework is the Chinese company's largest project in Poland.

Tsai Ing-wen's reelection as Taiwan's president

Alicja Bachulska

Representatives of liberal Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), which advocates Taiwan's growing autonomy from mainland China, won the presidential and parliamentary elections held on the island on 11 January 2020. Tsai Ing-wen was reelected as president and her party won parliamentary majority with 61 out of 113 seats in Legislative Yuan. Given the ongoing tensions between Beijing and Taipei, the recent elections could be seen as a referendum on Taiwan's identity and its policy towards mainland China. The island's inhabitants seem increasingly sceptical towards the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) rule and its influence on Taiwan. Beijing's brutal handling of the situation in Hong Kong has also affected the results of Taiwanese elections. Police brutality and lack of dialogue with the protesters have testified to the plight of the Hongkongers living under 'one country, two systems' – a policy advocated by the mainland authorities as an answer to cross-strait tensions too. Beijing's current approach towards Taiwan seems self-defeating: it has strengthened local Taiwanese identity and radicalized many people's views regarding the CCP's rule and its implications for the region. As a result, any perspectives for the so-called 'peaceful reunification' envisioned by Beijing seem to be put off to an undefined time in the future. It should be simultaneously noted that the majority of Taiwan's public supports the maintenance of the status quo. In other words, the local population prefers not to