Latvia and Estonia say they have left a Chinese-backed forum aimed at boosting relations with Eastern European countries, in what appears to be a new setback for China’s increasingly assertive diplomacy.

China originally styled the forum as a “17 plus one” arrangement, but the number of European partners has now fallen to 14. Critics say the forum was an attempt to exploit differences among those states as part of a larger campaign to join with Russia in undermining the current rules-based international order dominated by the U.S. and its allies.