

EU, India should engage Taiwan

Written by Sana Hashmi, Zsuzsa Anna Ferenczy
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On Sept. 8, at the high-profile Ketagalan security forum, President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) urged countries to deal with the China challenge.

She said: “It is time for like-minded countries, and democratic friends in the Indo-Pacific region and beyond, to discuss a framework to generate sustained and concerted efforts to maintain a strategic order that deters unilateral aggressive actions.”

The “Taiwan model” to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic provides an alternative to China’s authoritarian way of handling it. Taiwan’s response to the health crisis has made it evident that countries across the world have much to learn from Taiwan’s best practices and if they do not engage Taiwan now, it will be a missed opportunity.

Major stakeholders in the Indo-Pacific region can no longer afford to overlook the benefits of Taiwan’s participation in the region. A concerted framework is needed to ensure Taiwan’s stable participation.

The EU and India can jointly work on this. As like-minded partners and two of the world’s largest economies, the EU and India have similar approaches toward Taiwan. Both try to balance between Washington and Beijing, avoiding the difficult choice of taking sides.

The joint statement of the 15th EU-India Virtual Summit on July 15 highlighted that India and the EU have “shared principles and values of democracy, freedom, rule of law, and respect for human rights, aiming at delivering concrete benefits for the people in the EU and India.”

These are the values that Taiwan has strongly upheld in a hostile environment. Taiwan’s rapid and efficient response has established that democracies can handle the pandemic without resorting to harsh measures, contrary to Beijing’s claim that democratic governance has failed to handle the crisis.

Continuing to neglect Taiwan because of a so-called “one China policy” will only be detrimental

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to countries' interests in the long term, and therefore to their security and well-being.

While Taiwan considers India an important focus country in its flagship New Southbound Policy, the two sides are yet to unleash the full potential of bilateral cooperation. EU countries have equally remained cautious about engaging Taiwan proactively.

However, Brussels is finally waking up and is toughening its stance on China. This means that the EU must also revisit its approach to Taiwan.

The visit of Czech Senate President Milos Vystrcil with a 89-member delegation to Taiwan has set a strong precedent for other EU member states. It was also a recognition of Taiwan as a full-fledged democracy, a crucial element when it comes to EU-Taiwan relations.

Vystrcil's visit has also given impetus to Taiwan's efforts to intensify its global stance. In particular because of Taiwan's COVID-19 response and overt international support, China's political and military coercion in the region has not ceased. On the contrary, it is on the rise.

Among European countries, France and Germany have robust ties with India and share similar concerns vis-a-vis China. Germany also recently unveiled its Indo-Pacific vision, which should push the EU to develop its own vision to the region.

Some of the important tenets of the EU-India partnership are to "work jointly to consolidate the rules-based global order," "develop a shared approach at the multilateral level to address global challenges and increase coordination" and "seek common responses to security threats and regional issues."

As a robust democracy and a thriving, technologically advanced economy, Taiwan would be able to contribute to their respective Indo-Pacific visions. For this to happen, the EU and India need to unlock the potential of their strategic partnership by deepening relations in key areas, such as renewable energy, cybersecurity and public health.

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With COVID-19, the reconfiguration of global supply chains could create new synergies for connectivity between India and Europe. In this context, the right thing to do is to expand this cooperation to include Taiwan.

Bringing Taiwan in would be a win for all.

It is important to understand that the international community needs to give Taiwan a seat at the high table. Relations with Taiwan should no longer be held hostage to relations with China.

With its critical geopolitical location, Taiwan has demonstrated willingness on several occasions to play a role in the Indo-Pacific region and contribute toward regional stability.

Taiwan is ready. The question remains whether the EU and India are ready to integrate and embrace Taiwan.

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