

## Taiwan must be included in talks

Written by Zsuzsa Anna Ferenczy  
Saturday, 12 June 2021 04:45

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During his first overseas trip as president, US President Joe Biden on June 15 is scheduled to visit Brussels and meet European Commission and Council presidents Ursula von der Leyen and Charles Michel. In their joint statement following consultations between European External Action Service Secretary-General Stefano Sannino and US State Department Deputy Secretary Wendy Sherman last month, the two sides reaffirmed the strength of transatlantic relations.

They stressed a mutual interest in strengthening the rules-based international order and pledged close cooperation in support of democratic values, global and regional stability, and human rights. They agreed to continue cooperation regarding “possible joint approaches to bring about positive change in the Indo-Pacific.”

Given the breakdown in mutual transatlantic trust during the previous presidency, convergence is welcome. While their capacities and ambitions diverge, Washington and Brussels agree on the need to strengthen their participation in the Indo-Pacific region, as both have indicated through concrete regional policy measures.

In order for their efforts to be comprehensive, effective and sustainable, they must recognize that no Indo-Pacific strategy will be inclusive without Taiwan’s participation.

They must also recognize Taiwan’s merit as a technologically advanced economy, a thriving democracy and a member of the WTO, led by a democratically elected government that can contribute as a legitimate member of the international community.

While the US and the EU value Taiwan’s role in ensuring a peaceful Indo-Pacific, it will take a greater amount of political will to treat Taiwan as a genuine partner. The upcoming summit provides an opportunity to act.

The containment of China in the Indo-Pacific remains Washington’s top foreign policy priority. Maintaining its strategic primacy in the region and the promotion of a liberal economic order has topped all other issues, including Russia, and — significantly — its relations with Europe. Washington needs the cooperation of like-minded partners, in particular Europe, to address

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global challenges, namely the “China threat,” not least an assertive Kremlin; overlooking the latter is dangerous not only for Europe’s security, but also for the US’.

Brussels, perceived as fragmented and slow to act, is also waking up to a new reality, one shaped by China’s growing authoritarian influence inside its borders, but also by Russia’s hostile posturing. With their support for the Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, EU member states are now pushing for a more robust EU in the region by investing more in scaled-up relations with like-minded partners.

With Washington and Brussels coalescing around a greater number of issues than those over which they diverge, there remain key issues the two must find agreement on. These include defense, trade and data privacy. With critical industries at the core of this geopolitical rivalry, it is imperative that they make progress in this area. Embracing Taiwan’s tech prowess as each seeks to invest more in new technologies, in particular semiconductors, will help align their priorities in the region. It is in their interests to engage Taiwan, and to advance common approaches toward 5G and AI as technical standards are set.

In April, the EU for the first time co-hosted a Global Cooperation and Training Framework workshop with Taiwan and the US to discuss a restructuring of the global supply chain. Launched in 2015, the framework aims to bring Taiwan’s expertise to the global stage, as it remains excluded from international organizations.

This exercise set a precedent for trilateral cooperation with Taiwan, showing a level of readiness, albeit of varying degrees in Washington and Brussels, to see Taiwan as a genuine partner. It can also be seen as a “possible joint approach,” as both sides urged in May, “to bring about positive change in the Indo-Pacific.”

Similarly, Washington and Brussels should support each other’s interest in trade and investment talks with Taipei. As the European Parliament is drafting its first standalone report on EU-Taiwan relations, there is a growing push for the commission to launch an impact assessment, public consultation and scoping exercise on an investment agreement with Taiwan before the end of 2021. On June 7, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said trade talks with Taiwan should begin soon.

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However, one must not underestimate the relevance of the political governance model and the different *modi operandi* on both sides of the Atlantic. While it is Washington that is in charge of drafting and implementing US foreign policy, the EU institutions in Brussels act as mere coordinators, seeking to achieve commonly agreed upon objectives, often representing the lowest common denominator.

For EU-level action, the unanimous agreement of every member state is needed; achieving unity on a given policy is in itself a success. It is in this context that the EU's China policy was born, and it is in the same context that its effectiveness must be assessed.

One must also remember that while there is no other issue in Washington that enjoys stronger bipartisan support than China, the EU remains fragmented on how to deal with Beijing. Nonetheless, there is a conceptual shift in Brussels from seeing China as an opportunity to seeing it as a threat — from being a strategic partner in 2003 to labeling it a systemic rival two years ago.

The depth of this shift hangs on the political will of member states. This could be decisive to the strength of the transatlantic alliance. Washington's approach to Brussels, in light of President Biden's visit to Europe, will be equally relevant for the sustainability of transatlantic ties.

Ultimately, it is the degree to which Beijing will honor its international commitments that will determine how the EU and the US will approach China and Taiwan. Embracing Taiwan is the best "possible joint approach to bring about positive change in the Indo-Pacific."

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