

Europe seems to have had enough

Written by Manik Mehta

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Resentment against China is growing not just in the US and Australia, but also increasingly in Europe, where leaders are showing signs of intense frustration over Beijing's dictates on what is acceptable regarding its "one China" principle and, by default, on the Taiwan issue.

Europeans no longer hide their "had enough" feelings about Beijing's attempts to influence their dealings with Taiwan.

Europe also feels emboldened by expressions of solidarity with Taiwan from US and Australian politicians, the latest statement being by Australian Minister of Defence Peter Dutton that it would be "inconceivable" for Australia not to join the US if Washington took action to defend Taiwan.

Dutton reinforced this resoluteness in an Australian newspaper interview after US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken spoke about the US and its allies taking "action" if China used force to alter the "status quo" in the Taiwan Strait.

The European Parliament has called for a "comprehensive enhanced partnership" with Taipei following the first-ever visit to Taiwan by a European Parliamentary delegation, which held talks with leading politicians.

Furthermore, the European Parliament has called for additional steps, which appear to Beijing as an effort to stray from its "one China" principle and slowly move toward establishing formal ties with Taiwan.

Even a simple change in the moniker of Taiwan's overseas representations — China insists that host countries do not allow use of the term "Taiwan" in the nomenclature of such representations and use, instead, the term "Taipei" — is a provocation for Beijing. Such use of the name Taiwan is like waving a red flag to the snorting bulls of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), which controls the lives of about 1.4 billion people.

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For Europeans, Taiwan is a vibrant democracy with shared common values and ideals. Despite the international hurdles created by China, Taiwan has asserted itself as a robust economy and a leading technological powerhouse, particularly in areas such as artificial intelligence and semiconductor manufacturing.

By contrast, China's autocratic rule is anathema not just for the US, but also for Europe.

The CCP's endorsement of a third term for Chinese President Xi Jinping (习近平) has caused trepidation in the EU and the US. A resolution that the party passed last week is only the third of its kind in its 100-year history. The two previous resolutions were passed under Mao Zedong (毛泽东), who led the CCP to power in 1949, and Deng Xiaoping (邓小平), whose reforms in the 1980s turned China into an economic powerhouse.

As in the US, Europe is not happy with China's cultural policy, which purports to promote Chinese language and culture. Its Confucius Institutes, which have been set up in many parts of the EU and the US, have faced scrutiny, resulting in allegations that their work is inconsistent with their stated objectives and prompting calls for them to be shut down.

The institutes, established in 2004 to popularize Chinese language learning, are closely connected with the CCP — which is disconcerting for many in the US and Europe.

Notwithstanding the heavy economic club that China uses to clobber those deviating from its "one China" principle, European nations have been resisting its arm-twisting.

The Berlin-based Global Public Policy Institute has urged the German government to "boldly invest in its relations with Taiwan" and support efforts to give Taiwan a seat at the UN, while calling for it to support "Taiwan's better representation within international organizations" and intensify contacts between Taiwanese and German lawmakers, non-governmental organizations, think tanks and students.

Indeed, institute director Thorsten Benner has called on Europe and the US to "identify economic and technological levers" to use against China.

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One such lever would be to exclude China from the semiconductor added-value chain.

European nations are also taking steps to systematically intensify cooperation with Taiwan, not shying away from symbolic or other measures that could provoke China.

The European Parliament on Oct. 21 called on the EU to “strongly advocate for Taiwan’s meaningful participation in international bodies,” including UN organizations, and emphasized the need for a “comprehensive enhanced partnership with Taiwan.”

The EU was also urged to lay the groundwork for a “bilateral investment agreement with the Taiwanese authorities,” as well as calling on China to “put an immediate end to its ongoing intrusions into Taiwan’s air defense identification zone.”

EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell has been calling for the reinforcement of the “trade and investment relationship” and to further develop “existing dialogues,” such as the Industrial Policy Dialogue or the Digital Dialogue on Economy.

Borrell said that the EU would seek to implement the European parliament’s more far-reaching demands.

While some EU nations have been weighing how to break out of the “one China” mold, others have demonstrated resoluteness in taking steps that might see them as parting with EU policy.

Lithuania, which is resentful of China imposing its position on its foreign policy, was the first EU nation to agree to open a “Taiwan” representative office on its soil. China protested the change and recalled its ambassador in Lithuania.

While economic and business exchanges between Taiwan and the EU are common, a visit by

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Minister of Foreign Affairs Joseph Wu (吳國修) and a high-profile business delegation late last month to the Czech Republic, Slovakia and EU headquarters in Brussels angered Beijing. Wu was received in Brussels by European parliamentarians, including Charlie Wehners of the ultra-right-wing Swede Democrats. Wehners is the European Parliament's Rapporteur for Taiwan.

While European nations are trying to avoid causing harm to their ties with China, they are seemingly not averse to taking calculated risks or, as people in Brussels have told me, "targeted provocations" of China.

China could see more such bold steps by Europeans who are no longer willing to be caged within the rigid parameters of the "one China" principle.

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