

On Sunday, a 43-member Slovak delegation led by Slovak Deputy Minister of Economic Affairs Karol Galek arrived in Taiwan to discuss strategies to enhance economic cooperation between Bratislava and Taipei. This reciprocal visit comes after the signing of seven memorandums of understanding (MOUs) during a visit by a National Development Council delegation to Slovakia in October.

Following the recently concluded visit of parliamentarians from the Baltic countries, this is another delegation from central eastern Europe, arguably the most supportive of Taiwan's quest to expand its international space. Baltic lawmakers, while underlining their commitment to strengthen ties with Taiwan, showed their defiance of repeated intimidation from Beijing.

Notably, calls for the pursuit of closer ties with Taiwan are resounding not only in eastern Europe. Last month, the Dutch House of Representatives adopted a motion in support of Taiwan's participation in the International Criminal Police Organization.

Amsterdam's support for Taipei was cemented with two pro-Taiwan resolutions passed to urge the Dutch government to express its disapproval of Beijing's unilateral changes to the "status quo" in the Taiwan Strait and to push for the EU's support for Lithuania, which has been amply resolute in its support for Taiwan, despite Beijing's protests and diplomatic downgrading of ties with Vilnius.

Importantly, even in countries that remain heavily dependent on China economically, elected officials have taken the initiative to support Taiwan. Germany and Ireland serve as cases in point.

On Wednesday last week, the Irish Senate passed a resolution calling on the Irish government to forge relations with Taiwan, while condemning actions used to isolate Taiwan's engagement with international organizations.

In Germany, a new positive momentum for relations with Taipei was brought about by the formation of a new coalition government, which vowed to support "the relevant participation of democratic Taiwan in international organizations" and asserted that a change in the "status

quo” in the Taiwan Strait could only take place peacefully and by mutual agreement.

Once considered as a seemingly inseparable trade partner of European countries, China has gradually lost its credibility in Europe given its arrogant attitude and “wolf warrior” diplomacy.

The need to re-evaluate European ties with China has dominated the discourse, leading to the rebranding of China as Europe’s “strategic rival.”

The cases of Germany and Ireland deserve scrupulous attention as these countries are highly dependent on China in terms of the auto sector and the consumer market respectively. Taiwan gaining vocal support from Germany and Ireland seems to be novel, and their policy shift could mark a new milestone, with countries taking a tougher stance toward and being more cautious of Beijing’s hostility.

A key takeaway for pundits: Taiwan has made great strides in winning the hearts and minds of Europeans. The tide has turned against Beijing’s belligerent actions aimed at intimidating countries that have sent or would be sending signals of supporting Taiwan.

To Europeans, the situation of Taiwan has a clear connection with their security and has been an important part of their engagement with the Indo-Pacific region. A report in September by the European Commission, titled “EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific,” hailed Taiwan as a valuable partner with which the EU would deepen its trade and investment relationship; and increasing tensions in the Taiwan Strait was said to “have a direct impact on European security and prosperity.”

It is increasingly evident that the resilience of its democracy and its tireless struggle against authoritarian influence have made Taiwan a natural ally of European countries.

To democratic Europeans, the closely monitored Kremlin has long challenged the domestic stability of these countries. Russian propaganda and disinformation campaigns have been conducted to influence the public.

However, the understanding of China as a source of illiberal influence is only slowly emerging.

The vulnerability of European news outlets could be reduced if European countries pursue collaborative actions with Taiwan. Taiwan has been famous for tamping down Chinese disinformation in a creative way, such as employing the “2-2-2” response: responding within “20 minutes with 200 words and two images” that prioritize “humor over rumor.” European nations could surely benefit from Taiwan’s experience of combating Beijing’s digital interference.

One might remain skeptical of growing interactions between Taiwan and European countries, partly referring to the sustainability of recent ties amid Europe’s dependence on the Chinese economy. Another concern might be European nations’ ability to consolidate their strength and buttress their networks with democracies, like Taiwan, in case of economic retaliation by Beijing. How could these signs — like delegations, resolutions and MOUs, which are intrinsically non-binding — reflect a democratic alliance between Taiwan and European nations?

As legislatures play a critical part in the policymaking process in democracies, they not only represent people, but are also responsible for passing legislation, overseeing the executive branch, and contributing toward a balance between policies and resources.

In this sense, delegations of EU lawmakers and their vocal support for Taiwan should not be overlooked. Indeed, European parliamentary delegations serve as a bridge between the EU governments and the Taiwanese government.

Put differently, European lawmakers’ presence in Taiwan along with resolutions and MOUs, communicates the symbolic and pragmatic dimension of the EU’s Taiwan strategy.

Both sides have been working hard to consolidate their relations on diplomatic and economic fronts, laying the opportunity for deepening cooperation in other spheres.

Alliance between Taiwan and EU

Written by Huynh Tam Sang
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EU countries are supporting Taiwan by calling for the international community to advocate their democratic fellow's participation in international organizations, deepening their economic cooperation and people-to-people exchanges with the nation, and underlining the need to defend the "status quo" and security of the Taiwan Strait.

However, Taiwan and its partners in Europe could further explore initiatives to make their relations more sustainable.

As Taiwan and European partners still explore the new opening in their relationship, they should prioritize concrete strategies to gradually institutionalize their ties. As aptly put by Jakub Janda, director of the Prague-based European Values Center for Security Policy, European countries should not "stay neutral in the geostrategic confrontation between the Chinese Communist Party and liberal democracies," because if these countries do not pick a side, China would do it for them and they would eventually "have no choices."

The EU's solidarity with Taiwan should gain new momentum. One way to make Europe's ties with Taiwan more sustainable would be to hold joint democratic dialogues to facilitate regular interactions and foster people-to-people ties, perhaps starting with diplomatic delegations, think tank members and academics from both sides.

Additionally, Taiwan and its European partners could widen their networks by forming a trilateral democratic alignment, comprising the EU, Taiwan and the US. A tripartite alignment should focus on niche areas that it could accommodate, like fighting disinformation, enhancing official visits and facilitating collaboration between think tanks.

Huynh Tam Sang is a lecturer of the Faculty of International Relations at Ho Chi Minh City University of Social Sciences and Humanities and a research fellow at the Taiwan NextGen Foundation.

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