

EU legislators back Taiwan office

Written by Taipei Times

Sunday, 05 September 2021 04:24 -



The Lithuanian flag flutters in Vilnius on March 30, 2019, during the 15th anniversary celebration of Lithuania's membership in NATO.

Photo: Reuters

Sixty-two European lawmakers from 20 countries on Friday sent a joint open letter to Lithuanian officials, backing the Baltic nation's plan to deepen its ties with Taiwan.

"We write to express our solidarity and our support for Lithuania against the threats, intimidation and bullying behavior targeted at the Lithuanian people by the government of the People's Republic of China," they wrote.

"The Chinese government's aggressive actions towards Lithuania are symptomatic of its broader refusal to abide by norms, values and standards of the international rules-based order," the lawmakers added.

The letter was initiated by EU lawmakers Petras Austrevicius of Lithuania and Reinhard Butikofer of Germany, who chairs the European Parliament's delegation for relations with China, and was endorsed by lawmakers from 20 countries and five political groups, Butikofer said in a statement.

It was addressed to Lithuanian President Gitanas Nauseda, Lithuanian Prime Minister Ingrida Simonyte and Viktorija Cmilyte-Nielsen, the speaker of the Seimas, the Lithuanian parliament. Copies were also sent to European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and other senior EU officials.

The letter said that Beijing has put the Baltic country under pressure by recalling its ambassador and reportedly halting the issuance of export permits to some Lithuanian businesses, after the country announced that it would host a representative office bearing the name "Taiwan" in Vilnius.

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Lithuania has also announced its decision to open a representative office in Taiwan in the fall.

The letter also mentioned Beijing's de facto trade sanctions on Australia, Japan and Sweden, and its pressure campaign against the Czech Republic earlier this year, saying that China aims to coerce other countries into "geopolitical acquiescence."

The letter called on the EU to "take a firm stance against the Chinese government's coercive diplomacy" and reiterated the right of its member states to "conduct their economic, cultural and diplomatic relations with Taiwan as they see fit."

In Taipei, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs yesterday welcomed the open letter, thanking the bloc's legislature for showing support to Taiwan after its foreign affairs committee on Wednesday passed the EU-Taiwan Political Relations and Cooperation report and related proposals.

China's bullying of one EU member state has prompted European lawmakers to go beyond their political differences to express solidarity, the ministry said.

During a discussion on the EU's relations with China at an informal meeting of EU foreign ministers on Friday, Lithuanian Minister of Foreign Affairs Gabrielius Landsbergis said that the EU must adhere to its values and reduce dependence on trade with China.

The EU must also coordinate its China policy with like-minded countries in the Indo-Pacific region and beyond, as well as reinforce EU-NATO cooperation on China issues, Landsbergis said in a statement on the ministry's Web site.

Source: [Taipei Times - 2021/09/05](#)