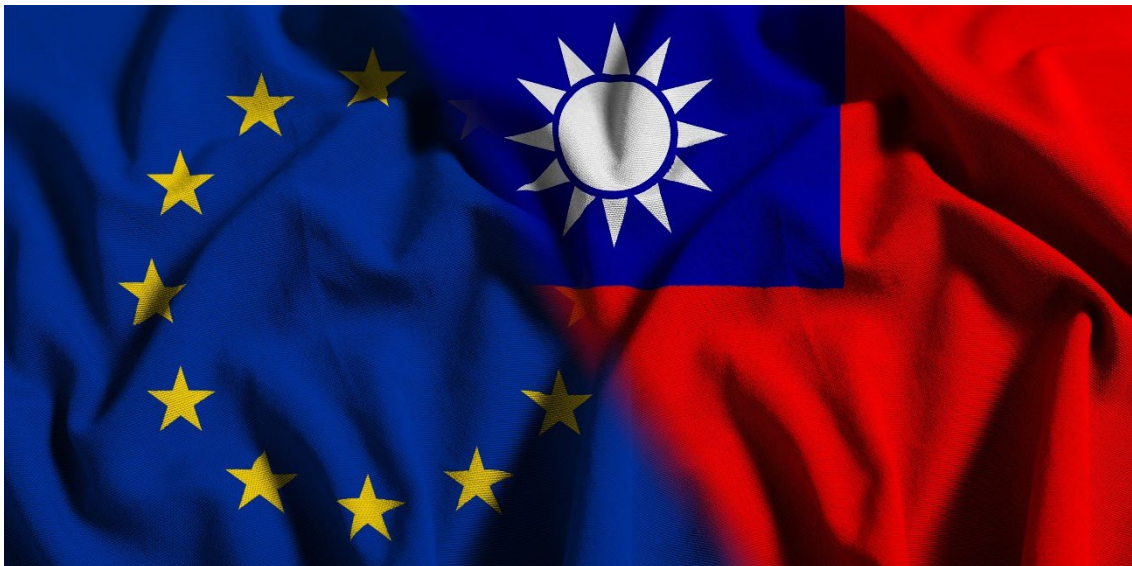


How to use the maximum of potential for the EU–Taiwan cooperation – What can the EU learn from the US and other actors?



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STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait are under strain. The People's Republic of China's diplomatic offensive against the Republic of China, Taiwan, has more recently been coupled with routinised large-scale and increasingly complex military exercises, incursions across the median line and an uptick in hybrid warfare tactics. China's assertiveness has been met, and sometimes anticipated, by United States-led military and diplomatic countermeasures aimed at fostering Taiwan's resilience within the broader context of a forceful China pushback. This paper takes stock of cross-Strait dynamics, including the action-reaction spiral which feeds Chinese insecurity and assertiveness, to present options for the European Union (EU) to bolster relations with Taiwan. Based on best practices from Group of Seven allies, the United States of America in particular, the paper argues that the EU should adopt a twin track of diplomacy and realistic deterrence, coupled with reassurances that all interested parties – including its Member States and like-minded parties – will abide by a 'One China' policy. The paper also argues that the EU's support of Taiwan's democracy needs to take into consideration its fraught and polarised domestic politics.

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List of abbreviations

A2/AD	Anti-Access/Area Denial
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CEE	Central and Eastern Europe
CSSTA	Cross-Strait Service Trade Agreement
CPTPP	Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership
DPP	Democratic Progressive Party
ECFA	Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement
EEAS	European External Action Service
EU	European Union
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
FIMI	Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference
FTA	Free Trade Agreement
G7	Group of Seven
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
GCFT	Global Cooperation and Training Framework
HIPPA	Hybrid Threats in the Indo-Pacific – Pilot Action
IP4	Indo-Pacific 4
IPMDA	Indo-Pacific Maritime Domain Awareness
KMT	Kuomintang (Chinese Nationalist Party)
MAGA	Make America Great Again
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NDS	National Defense Strategy
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PRC	People's Republic of China
ROC	Republic of China
ROK	Republic of Korea
SAFE	Security Action for Europe
TPP	Taiwan People's Party
TSMC	Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company
UK	United Kingdom

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UN	United Nations
USA	United States of America
WHA	World Health Assembly
WHO	World Health Organization
WTO	World Trade Organization

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Executive summary

Taiwan occupies a central position in contemporary geopolitical dynamics. Although it has operated as a *de facto* independent state since the conclusion of the Chinese civil war in 1949, the Republic of China, Taiwan, remains unrecognised by many countries as a sovereign entity. With a population of 23 million, Taiwan is a highly developed liberal democracy and a critical hub in the global economy, particularly as the leading producer of advanced semiconductors. Nonetheless, its political status remains unresolved, while geopolitical tensions are rising. Under the leadership of Xi Jinping, the People's Republic of China has adopted an increasingly assertive posture, declaring reunification as a historical imperative that cannot be postponed indefinitely. Since the first Trump administration, the United States of America (USA) and Japan, in particular, have paved the way for bolstering Taiwan's resilience. These allies from the Group of 7 (G7) have opened up diplomatic and political space for Taiwan, and inaugurated new security doctrines and force posture aimed at bolstering the cross-Straits status quo.

This paper examines the historical, strategic and political complexities surrounding the Taiwan issue and considers the most viable policy responses for the European Union (EU) to consider. The paper argues for a complex and multifaceted policy of engagement of Taiwan, one that covers the need for bolstered comprehensive diplomacy, including economic overtures, along with 'realistic deterrence'. The introduction spells out that policy roadmap, along with the need to square the circle with democratic support for Taiwan, across the aisle and, in connection with that, to strengthen EU-Taiwan relations within the broad tent of the EU's 'One China' policy. Finally, the introduction situates the paper within the pre-existing literature.

The second section provides a bird's-eye view of the history of Taiwan and of cross-Straits relations, to then zoom in on the new geopolitics of the first island chain, with Taiwan at its centre. The same foundational section highlights the distinction between the G7 allies' 'One China' policies and the People's Republic of China's 'One China' principle. This issue lies at the heart of everything, including competing narratives. The section relies on original research to situate Taiwan and cross-Straits tensions within the broader relational logic of USA-Japan-China security relations. Aside from introducing the formative role of the first Trump administration in incubating much of the USA-led Taiwan engagement, the paper finds instances of a 'One China – One Taiwan' policy taking shape among some G7 allies.

The third section consists of two parts. The first part provides a concise historical account of relations between the European Community and its successor, the EU, on one side, and the Republic of China and Taiwan, on the other. Given the complexity of Taiwan's status since the onset of the Cold War in both Europe and East Asia, it also details the evolution of the 'One China' policies of European states, in particular those outside the Eastern Bloc. Their role has been foundational in Taiwan's gradual diplomatic isolation from Europe and the emergence of EU-China relations in 1975. This historical account extends to the year 2016 and the collapse of cross-Straits relations following the electoral victory of Tsai Ing-wen and the Democratic Progressive Party, and China's ensuing bullying tactics. Consequently, the second part of the section examines in detail the state of play of EU-Taiwan relations up to mid-2025. Within this context, EU Member State relations with

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Taiwan are examined in the context of their direct relevance to the evolution of the EU's relations with both Taipei and Beijing.

The fourth section zooms in on best practices from G7 allies, starting with the USA and Japan, the two most proactive major powers, to overhaul their Taiwan policy. Under the US leadership, G7 allies have worked in lockstep across the comprehensive diplomatic, economic and deterrence domains to support Taiwan's *de facto* independence, open international space for the self-governed island, lure advanced semiconductor capacity, and bolster Taiwan's resilience. The section distinguishes between the cross-Strait policies pursued by succeeding US administrations to tease out best (and bad) practices for the EU and its Member States to evaluate.

The fifth section presents original options for enhanced EU cooperation with Taiwan, starting with comprehensive diplomacy. In that domain, the EU can work with G7 allies to open diplomatic space, foster a trade and investment agreement with Taiwan in the face of cooling EU-China relations, and buttress residual sovereignty by aiding the twelve states that still recognise Taiwan. Deeper EU-Taiwan education and research links should go hand-in-hand with added capacity in Area Studies expertise in Europe, a discipline that is severely underfunded and under strain, in its strategic and security declinations especially.

Concerning 'realistic deterrence', the EU and its Member States may profit from defence industrial cooperation with like-minded Indo-Pacific allies, starting with the USA, to bolster capabilities, sustainment and logistic support in a kinetic contingency. The EU and its Member States may support Taiwan through dual-use platforms and components that will aid its asymmetric defences and may also double down on two-way capacity-building in the non-kinetic realm with Taiwan, with specific reference to civil defence/humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, strategic communications and broader resilience in grey-zone scenarios.

Finally, the fifth section concludes with an emphasis on the need for supporting Taiwan across the political spectrum, with an emphasis on 'risk mitigation' rather than just crisis response. The EU can do more within its 'One China' policy and should be careful of hastening the tempo of cross-Strait tensions. The analysis teases out this relational logic by emphasising that the benefits of a 'One China'/'One Taiwan' policy platform, one that, for instance, advocates for the Republic of China, Taiwan's representation in international organisations tout court, ought to be adequately gauged by EU policy-makers. In the authors' view, this is a destabilising idea.

1 Introduction

Relations between the European Union (EU) and Taiwan are complex and multidimensional. Taiwan's defence is gaining ever more importance, with the United States of America (USA) and Japan paving the way towards a qualitative transformation of their posture towards the island's security and diplomatic space¹. This is exemplified by the USA–Japan summit held in February 2025. On that occasion, calls for the peaceful resolution of cross-Straits issues were reinforced by a commitment to oppose 'any unilateral attempts to change the status quo by force or coercion' along with a clear 'support for Taiwan's meaningful participation in international organizations'. The new rhetoric was seemingly taking shape in the last months of the Biden administration² and has found its way, with some qualifications, to the 2025 Group of Seven (G7) meetings³. Effectively, some G7 partners now extend Taiwan's participation to multilateral bodies *tout court*, including those that require statehood⁴, an important semantic change, the implications of which must be carefully examined. This is especially true as the EU continues to maintain its own 'One China' policy. The EU's position is distinct from the People's Republic of China's (PRC) own 'One China' principle, including long-standing support for the *status quo* and peaceful resolution of differences across the Taiwan Strait⁵.

This engagement with Taiwan is a reaction to China's subtle yet momentous reframing of cross-Straits relations' political foundations. Indeed, the literature suggests that G7 countries, Washington and Tokyo above all, are proactively responding to Beijing's assertive foreign policy⁶, which practitioners and analysts do not hesitate to characterise as a risk-prone posture aimed at achieving

¹ The official name of the polity subject to this paper is the 'Republic of China'. Official domestic publications use the moniker 'Republic of China (Taiwan)'. This paper uses the common term 'Taiwan' to refer to the polity, with the exceptions of instances concerning diplomatic relations and international law. In those cases, it uses the term 'Republic of China'.

² Statements, such as 'The United States will continue to support Taiwan's membership in international organizations where statehood is not a requirement' and 'we do not support Taiwan independence', disappeared in the new Taiwan Fact Sheet unveiled in February 2025 by the Trump administration, and shortly after the USA–Japan summit. Yet, multiple datapoints hint at a shift in Taiwan policy at the tail end of the Biden–Harris administration. The earlier version of the US Department of State Taiwan Fact Sheet, which constituted the roadmap of much of the Biden administration's thinking, became unavailable around the end of September 2024, as per a research in the Internet Archive: US Department of State, '[U.S. Relations With Taiwan: Bilateral Relations Fact Sheet](#)', archived webpage, 28 May 2022. Additional evidence of this shift can be inferred in: European External Action Service, '[EU-US: Dialogue on China and Indo-Pacific consultations](#)', Press Release, 11 September 2024; Australian Government, '[Joint Statement on Australia–U.S. Ministerial Consultations \(AUSMIN\) 2024](#)', Statement, 07 August 2024. Circumstantial evidence, including lack of language specific to Taiwan's inclusion in international organisations in the July 2025 EU–Japan summit, suggests that the EU does *not* endorse a 'One Taiwan' policy, unlike Japan.

³ Global Affairs Canada, '[Joint statement of the G7 Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Charlevoix](#)', Statement, 14 March 2025.

⁴ Interview with senior diplomats, 28 March 2025.

⁵ Paras. E and 6, European Parliament, '[Resolution on the misinterpretation of UN resolution 2758 by the People's Republic of China and its continuous military provocations around Taiwan \(2024/2891\(RSP\)\)](#)', P10_TA(2024)0030, 23 October 2024.

⁶ See, for example: E. B. Montgomery and T. Yoshihara, '[Conquering Taiwan by Other Means: China's Expanding Coercive Options](#)', *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol 48, No 1, 2025, pp. 143–163.

the island's unification⁷. This paper agrees, but suggests that new diplomatic, rhetorical and military developments have exacerbated pre-existing Chinese insecurity over prospects for unification that spurred a new sense of urgency, thus feeding action-reaction dynamics across the Taiwan Strait. An analysis of undercurrents in cross-Strait relations and the new geopolitics of the 'first island chain' may thus benefit the EU-Taiwan cooperation agenda, both by allowing for a potential division of labour among 'like-minded partners' and by avoiding the pitfalls of self-fulfilling prophecies that ensnare USA-China and Japan-China dynamics⁸.

Foundational features and stakes involved in the EU-Taiwan relationship are outlined below, along with this analysis's proposal of a tripartite approach. Specifically, the EU should adopt a twin track of diplomacy and realistic deterrence, coupled with reassurances that all interested parties – the EU, its Member States and G7+ allies – abide by their respective 'One China' policies while supporting Taiwan's democratic system of governance.

1.1 Strengthening the EU's comprehensive diplomacy with Taiwan

The EU's political, economic and research **diplomacy** with Taiwan can be strengthened. Lobbying for Taiwan's inclusion in functional international organisations where statehood is not necessary will aid the self-governed island's security and prosperity, hence be conducive to its resilience: a case in point being participation as an observer in the works of the World Health Organization (WHO). Beyond shared liberal and democratic values and sustained people-to-people exchanges, Taiwan is the EU's 13th largest trading partner and most important supplier of advanced semiconductors, key to green and digital transitions and thus the EU's economic security⁹. Following up on trailblazing initiatives by the USA and Japan, the EU and its Member States have successfully courted Taiwanese semiconductor capacity on the continent through industrial policies, as well as ways to de-risk from over-dependence. The EU may more fully leverage Taiwan-EU economic relations through a trade and/or investment agreement. In addition, academic diplomacy initiatives aiming to deepen Area Studies knowledge of East Asia, Taiwan, and China may contribute to further defining EU interests in Taiwan's security and cross-Strait relations, while embedding Taiwan within the union's research landscape via membership in Horizon Europe would provide a joint platform for economic cooperation through breakthroughs in new technologies.

1.2 Providing realistic deterrence

The EU has substantial stakes in cross-Strait peace and prosperity. This paper aims to map out **realistic deterrence** options for the EU, given that the geopolitical situation is in flux, resources are finite, and prioritisation of the European security theatre is becoming ever more crucial. Specifically, which options could be considered realistic in light of the USA's gradual security and

⁷ Bloomberg, '[Blinken Says China Wants to Seize Taiwan on 'Much Faster Timeline''](#)', 17 October 2023; B. Irdi, '[Beniamino Irdi in Informazioni della Difesa on Cross-Strait relations in the aftermath of the Taiwanese election](#)', *Atlantic Council*, 09 April 2024; Interview with high-ranking French diplomat, 27 January 2023.

⁸ J. Stavridis, '[Five Signs That the US and China Will Go to War](#)', *Bloomberg*, 16 April 2025.

⁹ European Commission, '[EU and Taiwan hold third Trade and Investment Dialogue](#)', Directorate-General for Trade and Economic Security, 17 December 2024.

diplomatic retrenchment, at the very least from Europe, but possibly also from portions of the Asia-Pacific¹⁰? Unity of purpose is under doubt given the American President's dislike of prolonged military interventions and transactional instincts, which also apply to Taiwan¹¹, as well as the 'Make America Great Again' (MAGA) movement's preference for military restraint¹². Moreover, high-ranking European diplomats acknowledge that effective sanctions need to be sustainable over time to be effective¹³. In any event, China's economy is more than ten times the size of Russia's. Most importantly, China's economy is key to central nodes, commodities and supply chains on which the EU and its economy are dependent (and, to a lesser extent, *vice versa*), an aspect made abundantly clear with the 2025 informal embargo on rare earths¹⁴. This section will explore creative policy options for the EU and its Member States' potential security contributions, considering the 'tyranny of geography', limited resources and pre-existing foreign policy goals in Asia.

1.3 Bolstering democratic support and reassurances

Finally, and of vital importance, squaring the circle between **democratic support for Taiwan and reassurances** will be key to preserving peace and stability across the Strait. For instance, the EU is right in spelling out adherence to its 'One China' policy. However, the recent disappearance of that language from G7 communiques is unhelpful¹⁵, and the EU should reintroduce that language and act on it, because effective deterrence links reassurances with red lines¹⁶. Regarding the EU's 'One China' policy and its desire to preserve peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait, EU-Taiwan cooperation should be pursued without falling prey to Taiwan's own domestic polarisation over relations with China and ethno-political identity. If cooperation does not take place 'across the aisle', the EU and its Member States may end up siding with one political force at the expense of others, thus running against the stated goal of defending and supporting Taiwan's democracy.

1.4 Methodology

This paper's analysis rests on an interdisciplinary approach that combines:

- **Deep knowledge of the broad international political, economic and security undercurrents** driving the EU and its Member States closer to Taiwan. This policy study leverages disciplinary

¹⁰ Washington Post, '[Secret Pentagon memo on China, homeland has Heritage fingerprints](#)', 29 March 2025; The Economist, '[China hawks are losing influence in Trumpworld, despite the trade war](#)', 15 April 2025.

¹¹ B. Emmott, *Deterrence, Diplomacy and the Risk of Conflict over Taiwan*, Routledge: Oxon & New York, USA, International Institute for Strategic Studies Adelphi Series, 2024, p. 63; Nikkei Asia, '[Five things John Bolton revealed on Trump's Asia policy](#)', 20 June 2020.

¹² The Economist, '[China hawks are losing influence in Trumpworld, despite the trade war](#)', 15 April 2025.

¹³ Interview with high-ranking diplomats, 28 March 2025.

¹⁴ H. Farrell and A. L. Newman, '[Weaponized Interdependence: How Global Economic Networks Shape State Coercion](#)', *International Security*, Vol 44, No 1, July 2019, pp. 42-79; F. Bermingham, '[EU industry could grind to a halt over China's rare earth restrictions](#)', *South China Morning Post*, 04 June 2025.

¹⁵ Global Affairs Canada, '[Joint statement of the G7 Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Charlevoix](#)', 14 March 2025. It should be noted that all G7 members have stated a 'One China' policy in the past.

¹⁶ B. S. Glaser, J. Chen Weiss and T. J. Christensen, '[Taiwan and the True Sources of Deterrence: Why America Must Reassure, Not Just Threaten, China](#)', *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2024.

strengths in foreign policy analysis and the international relations of the Asia-Pacific, including understanding the burgeoning security role of European players in the region.

- **Area Studies expertise on the history of cross-Strait dynamics and the Taiwan initiatives undertaken by major G7+ players**, starting with the USA and Japan.
- **Expertise in strategic studies, especially strategic communications** as well as hybrid warfare/grey zone tactics and countermeasures, with an eye to the enhancement of Taiwanese resilience.

This paper adopts a **qualitative methodology** that provides an appreciation of the recent history behind cross-Strait tensions, including specific case studies. This approach will be focused on: (i) lessons learnt from the approaches of other partners; and (ii) potential scenarios and specific policy agenda items. The analysis targets official documentation, press material in the original languages (including Mandarin Chinese and Japanese) as well as more than twenty interviews and roundtable discussions with Taiwanese, Japanese, Chinese, American and European foreign and security policy-makers over the course of 2023–2025, including within the European External Action Service (EEAS)¹⁷.

1.5 Overview of existing knowledge

The academic literature on the relations between the EU and its Member States on one side and Taiwan on the other features a major gap throughout the second half of the 2000s and the first half of the 2010s. The gap reflects Europe's prioritisation of relations with China following the announcement of the EU-China strategic comprehensive partnership in 2003. Early 2000s scholarship by Mengin, Tubilewicz and Cabestan provides a comprehensive account of the genesis and evolution of the EU's 'One China' policy, even though it is generally mediated through the experiences and policy positions of Member States, rather than through the prism of EU policy-making, and with a preponderant focus on the economic dimension of the relation¹⁸. Rawnsley and, once again, Tubilewicz focus on Taiwan's efforts to engage with European polities in the aftermath of the geopolitical overhauls of the 1990s¹⁹. Within this research landscape, van der Putten stands out for a critical reflection on the broader implications of the EU's lack of security engagement in

¹⁷ The extended timespan and number of high-level meetings allow for triangulation on a sensitive subject. Interview and aural data used in the research article are GDPR-compliant, dependent on interviewees' consent, and fully anonymised to avoid identification of the sources. The authors of the study have written extensively on the subject in recent years and have participated in Track 1.5 dialogues and expert meetings on maritime security, hybrid warfare and economic security specific to East Asia in Brussels, China, Taiwan, North America, South Korea and Japan between March and September 2025. Both authors regularly organise and engage in policy dialogues specific to EU-Asia relations.

¹⁸ F. Mengin, '[A Functional Relationship: Political Extensions to Europe-Taiwan Economic Ties](#)', *The China Quarterly*, Vol 169, 2002, pp. 136–153; G. Schubert, '[Towards a New European Taiwan Policy? Some Preliminary Reflexions](#)', *Asia Europe Journal*, Vol 1, 2003, pp. 263–280; C. Tubilewicz, '[Europe in Taiwan's Post-Cold War Foreign Relations](#)', *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, Vol 18, No 2, 2007, pp. 415–453; J. Cabestan, '[The Taiwan Issue in Europe-China Relations: An Irritant More Than Leverage](#)', in D. Shambaugh et al. (eds.), *China-Europe Relations: Perceptions, Policies and Prospects*, Routledge, London, United Kingdom, 2007, pp. 84–101.

¹⁹ G. D. Rawnsley, *Taiwan's Informal Diplomacy and Propaganda*, Palgrave Macmillan, London, United Kingdom, 2000; C. Tubilewicz, *Taiwan and Post-Communist Europe: Shopping for Allies*, Routledge, New York, USA, 2007.

the Asia-Pacific and with Taiwan²⁰. Publications from the Ma Ying-jeou era between 2008 and 2016 reflect a period of stasis in the EU-Taiwan relations (as discussed in depth in section 3 of this paper), highlighting the self-imposed constraints imposed by Sino-European relations²¹. Lim and Wacker, for instance, argue that 'Beijing dictates the rules of the game while the EU tends to lean toward the Chinese side in its statements and documents', while the EU is 'without any real leverage vis-a-vis the PRC' over the Taiwan issue²². A second body of literature developing throughout the 2000s looked instead at a possible resolution to the Taiwan issue rooted in the experience of conflict resolution in Europe²³, and, more broadly, in the EU integration process²⁴ – studies, which, nowadays, stand as evidence of the grave deterioration of cross-Strait relations since the mid-2010s.

The new, tense course of cross-Strait relations that started in 2016 (see section 2), in turn, resulted in a new wave of scholarship on EU-Taiwan relations, as well as in the proliferation of policy literature addressing a profoundly different geopolitical scenario. Recent academic literature has re-examined the meaning of the EU's 'One China' policy. Hsieh examines how the EU's engagement with Taiwan within the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT)/World Trade Organization (WTO) framework, and the continuing yet fraught pursuit of a bilateral investment agreement, is evidence of 'the flexibility and latitude of recognition' that can still be exercised even 'within the space of non-recognition', supporting arguments that conceive 'recognition' as 'a gradual process' and proving 'the legal position that unrecognised entities should not be regarded as a nullity'²⁵. Brown, instead, focuses on the interrelation between national, intergovernmental, and supranational 'subsystems' in the Taiwan policy of the 'EU', pointing out divergent developments within the subsystems themselves. Brown argues that the (i) 'greatest push for broadening relations with Taiwan originated in the national subsystem'; (ii) that the 'intergovernmental subsystem – responsible for EU-level common positions – has not seriously revisited the "one China policy"'; and (iii) that in the supranational subsystem the European Parliament 'expanded the discourse of how the EU should interact with Taiwan, while the European Commission moved beyond dealing only with economic and cultural matters', leading to a situation in which 'the core of the "One China policy" remains untouched but increased European engagement with Taiwan

²⁰ F. P. van der Putten, ['The EU Arms Embargo, Taiwan, and Security Interdependence between China, Europe and the United States'](#), *Indian Journal of Asian Affairs*, Vol 20, No 1-2, 2007, pp. 59-74.

²¹ H. Su, ['EU-Taiwan Relationship since 1981'](#), in T. Christiansen et al. (eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of EU-Asia Relations*, Palgrave Macmillan: London, United Kingdom, 2013.

²² P. Lim and S. Winkler, ['The European Union's Relations with the Republic of China \(Taiwan\)'](#), in J. Damm and P. Lim (eds.), *European Perspectives on Taiwan*, VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2012, pp. 170-195.

²³ K. Brown, ['Taiwan and the Peace Process in Northern Ireland: Parallels and Divergences'](#), *Taiwan in Comparative Perspective*, Vol 4, 2012, pp. 189-200.

²⁴ G. Schubert, ['Becoming Engaged? The European Union and Cross-Strait Relations'](#), *The German Journal on Contemporary Asia*, Vol 89, 2003, pp. 05-25; B. Johansson, 'The EU Two-Level Sovereignty System as a Model for Taiwan and China', *Taiwan in Comparative Perspective*, Vol 1, 2007, pp. 70-75; S. Fleischauer, ['Cross-Strait Relations and the Way Forward: Observations from a European Integration Perspective'](#), *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs*, Vol 41, No 3, 2012, pp. 117-142.

²⁵ P. L. Hsieh, ['Rethinking Non-Recognition: The EU Investment Agreement with Taiwan under the One-China Policy'](#), *Leiden Journal of International Law*, Vol 33, No 3, 2020, p. 710.

indicates that it is “fraying at the edges”²⁶. Krumbein instead examines EU-Taiwan relations through the lens of the ‘Normative Power Europe’ approach focusing on the role of values in the EU’s identity and policies, arguing that changes in the EU’s Taiwan policy remain ‘more symbolic than substantial’, noticing the increase in the number of statements and resolutions in favour of the island, and of political visits to it, without tangible developments in the conclusion of a bilateral investment agreement or in the field of security cooperation²⁷.

Recent policy literature has been concerned with both EU and continental ‘European’ perspectives, including a North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) dimension, on relations with Taiwan. Lee and Schreer argue that ‘Taiwan and its U.S. partner should guard against overly optimistic expectations that major European powers, the EU and NATO will play a major role in shoring up the beleaguered island’s position in the face of growing Chinese coercion’, with ‘a strong and coherent European response in the event of a major crisis or war in the Taiwan Strait’ remaining ‘unlikely’, due to the threat of Russian expansionism. The authors identify overdependence on China’s rare earths and critical metals as a major obstacle to the emergence of a unified economic response against a coercive move by Beijing²⁸. A 2022 study by the International Institute for Strategic Studies, similarly, identifies ‘political will’ and ‘political unity’ within and beyond the EU framework as the key elements to gauge in a response to a coercive move by Beijing against Taipei, highlighting the normative value of defending Taiwanese democracy for the EU itself, and the union’s experience in placing sanctions against China²⁹. A 2024 Royal United Services Institute study, focusing on the impact of a potential Taiwan crisis by 2027 on European security, identifies high risks in integrated air and missile defence and anti-submarine warfare because of high dependence on US assets, as well as moderate risks for the deployment of ground forces³⁰.

Yeh provides instead what is arguably the most comprehensive range of options for the EU and its Member States’ governments to respond to grey zone operations conducted by China in the Taiwan Strait available in the literature. Yeh argues that Europe should raise ‘diplomatic and economic costs of grey zone coercions’ by increasing statements publicising Beijing’s grey zone activities, enhancing military and dual-use export controls, linking Chinese escalations in the grey zone with greater levels of engagement and international cooperation with Taiwan, and sanctioning Chinese military-linked companies. The author also argues that Europe should strengthen Taiwan’s resilience by supporting its renewable energy development, launching cyber-defence collaborations and cooperation on infrastructure resilience, cooperating for resilience against disinformation, and approving exports of military and dual-use technologies. Finally, Yeh argues

²⁶ S. A. W. Brown, [‘Fraying at the Edges: A Subsystems/Normative Power Analysis of the EU’s “One China Policy/Policies”’](#), *The China Quarterly*, Vol 252, 2022, p. 1019.

²⁷ F. Krumbein, [‘Leaving the Dragon’s Shadow: Normative Power Europe and the Emergence of a Taiwan Policy in the EU?’](#), *Journal of European Integration*, Vol 46, No 2, 2024, p. 183.

²⁸ S. Lee and B. Schreer, [‘Will Europe Defend Taiwan?’](#), *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol 45, No 3, 2022, pp. 175–176.

²⁹ H. Boyd et al., [‘Taiwan, Cross-Strait Stability and European Security: Implications and Response Options’](#), *International Institute for Strategic Studies*, 2022, p. 37.

³⁰ S. Kaushal and J. Suess, [‘The Impact of a Taiwan Strait Crisis on European Defence’](#), Whitehall Report, *Royal United Services Institute*, 01–24, 2024.

that Europe should reaffirm its commitment to an international rules-based order via coordinated maritime presence in the Taiwan Strait, by resisting Beijing's international lawfare, and by both supporting Taiwan's participation in multilateral institutions and engaging it through alternative institutions³¹. Chu instead narrowly focuses on recommendations for the EU and institutions to support Taiwan's security, arguing in favour of a 'multiagency approach' that de-emphasises the dominant role of the European Parliament, the signature of a 'comprehensive economic partnership' and the establishment of a 'comprehensive trade framework' focused on technological cooperation, and the establishment of a 'strategic communications hub' on the island to fight threats in the information domain³².

A second subset of recent policy literature has focused instead on the Taiwan policy and the agency of EU Member States within the EU framework³³. While a state-by-state examination of Member States' Taiwan policy is out of the scope of this paper, this body of literature possesses some relevance because of the interplay between Member States and EU institutions. Ultimately, a comprehensive examination of the existing knowledge on EU-Taiwan relations identifies a key gap in the lack of policy literature on the subject rooted in the nuanced, evolving geopolitics of the Asia-Pacific, including the structural role of the USA, rather than exclusively in the trajectory of the geo-economic and values-based relation between the EU and China and the constraints that this imposes on relations with Taiwan.

2 Cross-Strait relations and the new geopolitics of the first island chain

The existence of both a 'People's Republic of China' (PRC) and a 'Republic of China' (ROC) is a by-product of the Chinese civil war and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)'s seizure of power on mainland China. This was at the expense of the Kuomintang (KMT, the Chinese Nationalist Party) regime that had ruled the ROC since 1927 and had been at the frontline of the war of resistance against Imperial Japan. Taiwan, previously a province of the Qing Empire, had been under Japanese colonial rule for 50 years as a result of the first Sino-Japanese war of 1894-5, won by Imperial Japan. Following Japan's unconditional surrender in 1945, Taiwan was restored to the ROC, which transferred its control, hence its authoritarian political institutions, to the island. By the end of the civil war in 1949, lost by the KMT, the Nationalist regime fled to Taiwan. Mainland elites tied to the

³¹ A. Yeh, ['Mapping Out Europe's Response to Grey Zone Escalations Against Taiwan'](#), *Friedrich-Naumann-Stiftung für die Freiheit*, 2024, pp. 14-17.

³² P. Chu, [Taiwan's Strategic Importance for the EU: A New Era \(2016-2024\)](#), AIES Focus, *Austrian Institute for European and Security Policy*, No 8, 2024.

³³ V. Bohman and B. Davies, [Taiwan, Sverige och synen på "ett-Kina-politiken"](#) [Taiwan, Sweden and the Perception of the 'one China' Policy], *Nationellt kunskapscentrum om Kina*, 2022; M. Šimalčík et al. (eds.), [Beyond the Dumpling Alliance: Tracking Taiwan's relations with Central and Eastern Europe](#), *Central European Institute of Asian Studies*, 2022; A. B. Forsby, [Much Ado, Little Afoot? How the Nordics Approach Taiwan](#), *Danish Institute for International Studies*, 2024; A. Stanzel, [Die drohende Delegitimierung des Status Taiwans: Die Dynamik des Konflikts zwischen China und Taiwan unter Präsident William Lai](#) [The Threat of Delegitimation of Taiwan's Status: The Dynamics of the Conflict between China and Taiwan under President William Lai], SWP-Studie 2025/1, *Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik*, 2025.

Nationalist regime followed suit, together with common people escaping the Communist revolution, leading to an exodus ranging between 1.5 to 2 million people. Prior to 1949, Taiwan had been inhabited by an ethnic Han Chinese majority-strong population of 6 million people, consisting largely of labourers' descendants from coastal China brought to the island by Dutch colonial rulers in the 17th century and by Austronesian aboriginal minorities³⁴. Mass migration created a new contraposition between Mandarin-speaking 'Mainlanders' and local 'Taiwanese' people speaking southern Chinese varieties, leading to a further erasure of Taiwanese aboriginals³⁵. The Korean War (1950-1953) and the crystallisation of opposing Cold War blocs reified the separation of a Communist-controlled PRC from a Nationalist-controlled ROC, with occasional skirmishes and crises across the Strait. Both sides claimed to be the sole legitimate 'China', to the point that Taipei refused creative 'Two China' solutions allowing for the ROC's parallel membership in international organisations – a refusal that paved the way for its exclusion from the United Nations (UN) once the PRC was granted UN status in 1971³⁶.

The end of the Cold War added other layers of complexity. The democratisation process experienced in Taiwan between 1987, when the martial law originally imposed in 1949 was lifted, and 1996, when the first direct election of the President of the ROC was held, further distanced the two societies across the Strait. Crucially, Taiwan's society experienced a gradual, at times tortuous, but ultimately extensive process of 'de-Sinification' coupled with the emergence of a more distinct 'Taiwanese' national identity³⁷. Since its establishment in 1986, the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) has been the main political party rallying constituencies that identify as distinctly Taiwanese and inextricably tied to democratic values, built in opposition to the 'Chinese nationalist' identity and the authoritarian rule of the KMT in the second half of the 20th century³⁸. Once in power, successive DPP governments in the 21st century have leveraged ethnic, historical and cultural nativist discourses in the country's identity politics to achieve a more profound socio-cultural

³⁴ T. Andrade, [*How Taiwan Became Chinese: Dutch, Spanish, and Han Colonization in the Seventeenth Century*](#), Columbia University Press: New York, USA, 2007.

³⁵ S. Corcuff, ['Taiwan's 'Mainlanders', New Taiwanese?'](#), in S. Corcuff (ed.), *Memories of the Future: National Identities Issues and the Search for a New Taiwan*, Routledge: New York, USA, 2002.

³⁶ R. C. Bush, [The Significance of the Republic of China for Cross-Strait Relations](#), *Brookings Institution*, 20 May 2011.

³⁷ D. Liao et al. ['The Decline of "Chinese Identity" in Taiwan?!'](#), *East Asia*, Vol 30, No 4, 2013, pp. 273-290.

³⁸ A distinctive Taiwanese identity has been favoured also by Taiwan's modern history and its relationship with Japan. Imperial Japan gained control of the island following the First Sino-Japanese War of 1894-5 and successfully engineered a process of modernization and nation-building between 1895 and 1945, including the surface of a Japanese identity. A distinctive Taiwanese identity is sometimes coupled with fondness/nostalgia for Japan, the most popular foreign country in Taiwan. S. Kawashima, 'Nikka – nittai, nijū kankei no keisei' [Japan-ROC – Japan-Taiwan, the construction of a two-layered relationship], in S. Kawashima et al. (eds.), [Nittai Kankeishi, 1945-2008](#) [A History of Japan-Taiwan Relations: 1945-2008], Tōkyō Daigaku Shuppankai: Tokyo, Japan, 2009, pp. 11-38; Y. Yang, 'Higashi Ajia kōzō hendō to nittai kankei saihen' [The Structural Change in East Asia's Order and the Restructuring of Japan-Taiwan Relations], in S. Kawashima et al. (eds.), [Nittai Kankeishi, 1945-2008](#) [A History of Japan-Taiwan Relations: 1945-2008], Tōkyō Daigaku Shuppankai, Tokyo, Japan, 2009, pp. 197-230; D. C. Lynch, [Rising China and Asian democratization: socialization to 'global culture' in the political transformations of Thailand, China, and Taiwan](#), Stanford University Press: Stanford, USA, 2006, pp. 150-180.

transformation³⁹. Intergenerational change, the vibrancy of Taiwan's democracy and, conversely, the PRC's quasi-totalitarian turn under Xi Jinping, as well as its suppression of Hong Kong's semi-autonomy, have all contributed to this process. This has resulted in domestic fault lines running through a composite and fragmented history, impacting Taiwan's international relations. Conversely, Taiwan's relationship with its most significant 'Others', mainland China above all, but also Japan and the USA, also impacts its domestic politics and very identity.

Cross-Strait relations have reflected these fraught developments amidst deepening economic integration. Taiwan's first free and direct presidential elections in 1996 were met by China's firing of missiles intended to intimidate the Taiwanese electorate and President Lee Teng-hui, the first non-'Mainlander' KMT leader who was born and came of age during Imperial Japan's rule and oversaw the democratic transition process. With the arrival of pro-independence DPP President Chen Shui-bian (2000–2008), cross-Strait relations further deteriorated. Notably, China promulgated an Anti-Secession Law in 2005 allowing for the use of force in case of Taiwan independence (namely cessation of the ROC and establishment of a 'Republic of Taiwan') or if any peaceful means of unification are perceived exhausted, while Chen held an unsuccessful national referendum in 2008 aimed at Taiwan's bid for UN membership. It is worth noting that the USA and most Japanese governments prioritised reassuring the Chinese government during the Chen presidency, all while preserving a favourable balance of power in East Asia⁴⁰.

By the 2000s, cross-Strait relations began to be increasingly framed around the question of the so-called '1992 Consensus'. The term had been coined by an outgoing ROC Minister from the KMT to refer to a meeting held in Hong Kong in 1992 between representatives of two quasi-governmental organisations deputed with the management of cross-Strait relations. During this meeting, the two sides agreed on the existence of 'One China' but failed to agree on whether this was rightfully represented by the PRC or the ROC. The term, in fact, came to signify two different propositions once both Beijing and the KMT (now in opposition) began to use it by the mid-2000s. For Beijing, it implied recognition by the KMT and Taiwanese authorities *tout court* of the 'One China' principle, and thus an ultimate commitment to unification *with the* PRC. For the KMT, instead, it signified a commitment to the idea of 'One China' in opposition to 'Taiwan independence' without renouncing the ROC's continuing existence – a position that was codified as 'One China, respective interpretation'⁴¹. As a further difficulty encountered, the DPP, which controlled the executive branch when the '1992 Consensus' was floated, sternly refused to recognise the Consensus. Following the election of a new ROC president from the KMT, Ma Ying-Jeou in 2008, Beijing and

³⁹ S. Pelaggi, [L'isola sospesa: Taiwan e gli equilibri del mondo](#) [The suspended island: Taiwan and the world's equilibria], LUISS University Press: Rome, Italy, 2022, pp. 159–172.

⁴⁰ The exception to reassurances on Taiwan being the first Abe administration (2006–07) by virtue of Abe's familial ties with the ROC and strong anti-communism: S. Yoshikazu, ['Chūgoku Mondai' no Uchimaku](#) [Behind the Scenes of the 'China Problem'], Chikuma Shobō: Tokyo, Japan, 2008, pp. 75–7; T. J. Christensen, [Worse Than a Monolith: Alliance Politics and Problems of Coercive Diplomacy in Asia](#), Princeton University Press: New Jersey, USA, 2011, pp. 251–253.

⁴¹ M. Chen, ['Jiu'er Xianggang huitan' yu 'Jiu'er gongshi' – Lishi shishi yu jiedu](#) [The 1992 Hong Kong Talks' and the '1992 Consensus' – Historical Facts and Their Interpretations], Mainland Affairs Council of the ROC, 2019.

Taipei jointly touted the 1992 Consensus as the bedrock of greatly improved cross-Straits relations, even though a fundamental divergence on the meaning and scope of this rhetorical tool remained.

Cross-Straits relations flourished under Ma, with socio-economic integration deepening, but against mounting popular disaffection. Ma's first term was marked by the signing of the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (ECFA) in 2010 and sustained USA-China engagement under the first Obama administration, which censored the 2012 presidential bid of the relatively moderate DPP candidate Tsai Ing-Wen⁴². Yet, by 2014, Ma's failure to ram through the Legislative Yuan the ratification of the Cross-Straits Service Trade Agreement (CSSTA), a key component of the ECFA that would have liberalised trade and investment across multiple sensitive sectors, triggered a major crisis. Young protestors stormed and occupied the Taiwanese parliament, cementing pre-existing opposition to the agreement. Opposition against the CSSTA's opaque, top-down negotiation and botched ratification process, and against the likelihood of undue Chinese influence embedded in the CSSTA's provisions⁴³, as well as its negligible economic impact for Taiwanese workers, translated into the cratering of KMT support. The historic meeting between Xi and Ma in Singapore on 07 November 2015, the first between CCP and KMT leaders since 1945⁴⁴, reiterated the importance of the 1992 Consensus, yet failed to persuade Taiwanese public opinion, who shortly thereafter voted Tsai into the presidency in 2016.

The 2016 electoral round was pivotal, in which not only did Tsai win the presidency, but the DPP, for the first time ever, gained a parliamentary majority. Already during the 2012 presidential election campaign in Taiwan, Beijing had publicly refashioned the 1992 Consensus from a baseline of managing political relations to a precondition for maintaining functional cross-Straits ties⁴⁵. Facing the new electoral result, Beijing required Tsai and the DPP to acknowledge the 1992 Consensus, even though its content was unacceptable to the party's core constituencies. Their refusal, in turn, led to a marked deterioration in cross-Straits ties, which has continued following Tsai's second victory in 2020 and that of her DPP successor Lai Ching-te in 2024. China has leveraged political, economic and military pressure, greatly affecting Taiwan's international space, notwithstanding Tsai's attempts at striking a balance between the DPP's principled agenda and the need to maintain stable cross-Straits relations, as evidenced by her carefully worded public pronouncements. In fact, Tsai's cautiousness is evidence of a domestic dynamic that is often underappreciated against the backdrop of political polarisation over relations with China. The Taiwanese public tends to pull both the DPP and KMT into a measured approach when it comes to cross-Straits relations, in which diffuse wariness of political integration with Beijing is balanced out by a preference for *de facto* autonomy

⁴² A. Fifield et al., '[US concerned about Taiwan candidate](#)', *Financial Times*, 15 September 2011.

⁴³ On top of pre-existent Chinese coercive economic statecraft aimed at Taiwanese domestic politics in the late 1990s and early 2000s: W. J. Norris, [Chinese Economic Statecraft: Commercial Actors, Grand Strategy, and State Control](#), Cornell University Press, Ithaca, USA, 2016, pp. 111-130.

⁴⁴ J. deLisle, [Mr. Xi Meets Mr. Ma for a Singapore Fling: Symbolic Summitry, Difficult Politics, and the Future of Cross-Straits Relations](#), *Foreign Policy Research Institute*, 2015.

⁴⁵ A. Insisa, '[No Consensus across the Strait: Chinese and Taiwanese Strategic Communications in a Contested Regional Order](#)', *Asian Perspective*, Vol 45, No 3, 2021, pp. 503-531.

over full, *de jure* independence that may jeopardise Taiwanese peace, stability and economic prosperity.

In response to Tsai's refusal: China lobbied against and disrupted Taiwan's inclusion in international organisations, including those that do not require statehood and even others with just observer status; it resumed poaching the island's diplomatic allies, which stabilised during the Ma-Xi years, with an original 22 having almost halved by 2025; it forcibly 'repatriated' to the Mainland ROC citizens suspected of crimes committed in third countries; and it employed economic sticks and carrots targeting selected Taiwanese constituencies with greater gusto⁴⁶. Finally, China continued improving and expanding its coercive military toolkit aimed at Taiwan. This includes sustained spending in its military, constabulary and para-military arsenal, together with an emphasis on an Anti-Access Area Denial (A2/AD) strategy to prevent American power projection within the first island chain – a set of archipelagic features running from Japan through Taiwan, the Philippines and down to Borneo – hence denting the USA's ability to come to Taiwan's defence.

Pressure on Taiwan mirrored Beijing's more risk-prone posture aimed at securing disputed territorial and maritime claims in the East and South China Seas, as well as across its land border with India. This was a measure of China's post-2008 Global Financial Crisis over-confidence, of longer-standing chauvinistic discourse within the PRC⁴⁷, as well as reactivity to perceived wrongs⁴⁸. Such a posture may also have been symptomatic of the USA-China security dilemma⁴⁹, but the Obama-Biden administration's 'Pivot to Asia' prioritised diplomacy, Trans-Pacific Partnership negotiations and eventually lacked the formally announced military prioritisation and grand strategic coherence. Moreover, in its relationship with China, the USA arguably prized engagement and prudent balancing throughout the Obama administration⁵⁰, including restraint on arms sales to Taiwan⁵¹. It was the first Trump presidency that ushered in a new approach to the PRC, one that took stock of the brewing Beltway consensus to frame China as an adversary and full-blown revisionist actor and thus steered the USA into a whole-of-government pushback of the PRC⁵². Against Trump's transactional instincts, a renewed emphasis on interstate deterrence and national defence reflected the steady input of servicemen working for the administration in multiple capacities⁵³.

⁴⁶ The Economist, '[Can China sap a divided and isolated Taiwan of its will to resist?](#)', 01 May 2025.

⁴⁷ F. M. S., Stevens, [Chinese Assertiveness, Ideational Mobilization, and the Rise of Xi Jinping: Achieving Something](#), Routledge: New York, USA, 2025.

⁴⁸ G. Pugliese, [What Does the Japan-China Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands Standoff Mean?](#), *Italian Institute for International Political Studies*, 20 December 2016.

⁴⁹ M. Dian, '[The Pivot to Asia, Air-Sea Battle and contested commons in the Asia Pacific region](#)', *The Pacific Review*, Vol 28, No 2, 2015, pp. 237-257.

⁵⁰ Y. Funabashi, [Shukumei no ko](#) [Child of destiny], Bungei Shunjū: Tokyo, Japan, Vol 1, 2024, pp. 224-5; B. Obama, [A Promised Land](#), Random House: New York, USA, 2020, p. 476.

⁵¹ S. Kan, [Obama's policy on arms sales to Taiwan needs credibility and clarity](#), PacNetNo.39, *Pacific Forum*, 7 July 2015.

⁵² R. D. Blackwill and R. Fontaine, [Lost Decade: The US Pivot to Asia and the Rise of Chinese Power](#), Oxford University Press: Oxford, United Kingdom, 2024, pp. 59-74; The White House, [National Security Strategy of the United States of America](#), 18 December 2017.

⁵³ J. Mann, '[The Adults in the Room](#)', *New York Review of Books*, 26 October 2017.

Box 1: The USA, Japan, and G7 Players' 'One China' Policies

Formal recognition of the PRC does not necessarily mean acknowledgement that Taiwan is an inseparable part of China, as Beijing insists through its 'One China' principle. In fact, all G7 members, including the EU, have 'One China' policies, allowing for unofficial ties with Taiwan. 'One China' policies are fluid constructs that shift in response to changing power dynamics, as well as political, economic and normative developments. For instance, the 1964 Sino-French communiqué that established diplomatic relations made no mention of Taiwan, aiming to explore the potential for a 'Two China' solution⁵⁴. In contrast, the Chinese economy's growing lure, including its procurement market, shifted the language in the 1994 joint communiqué to China's position, to the point that the French government 'views Taiwan as part of Chinese territory'⁵⁵. Today, though, France is gradually expanding Taiwan's strategic *and* diplomatic space through actions such as sending naval vessels through the Taiwan Strait, selling dual-use equipment, and servicing the Dassault Mirage 2000 fighter jets sold to the ROC air force in 1992, suggesting unofficial recognition of a sovereign state.

There has been a substantial process of learning and imitation over time. Japan's 'One China' diplomatic artifice was inspired by France (1964) and, especially, by Canada (1970) and Italy (1970), which normalised relations with China without compromising over unofficial ties with Taiwan⁵⁶. According to the 1972 Sino-Japanese joint communiqué that formally established diplomatic relations between Japan and the PRC, Tokyo 'fully understands and respects [Beijing's] stand' (over Taiwan)⁵⁷. This phrase aptly represents the typical ambiguity adopted by democratic allies' 'One China' policies, because they merely 'take note' or 'acknowledge' China's position, without necessarily accepting it, thereby opening up space for Taiwan, as well as the rights and plight of the self-ruling island, specifically its right to self-determination as well as peace and security. Recent references by G7+ countries to 'peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait' and peaceful resolution of issues'⁵⁸, which have gained momentum from 2021 onwards thanks to the USA and Japan's advocacy, are premised on these very norms.

At the same time, having recognised the PRC, G7+ countries have relinquished formal diplomatic relations with the ROC and have pursued strategic ambiguity to avoid giving Beijing the impression of having state-to-state relations with Taiwan. Strategic ambiguity prevents the hosting of official representative offices in the respective capitals but allows for unofficial counterparts; curtails official, especially public, visits by acting government representatives; and implies opposition to 'any unilateral actions to threaten such peace and

⁵⁴ J. P. Cabestan, '[France's Taiwan Policy: A Case of Shopkeeper Diplomacy](#)', *Sciences Po – CERI*, July/August 2001, pp. 02-03.

⁵⁵ French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, [Communiqué conjoint franco-chinois sur le rétablissement de relations de coopération entre la France et la Chine](#) [Joint French-Chinese communication regarding the establishment of cooperation relations between France and China], 12 January 1994.

⁵⁶ M. Inoue, [Nicchū kokkō seijōka no seiji-shi](#) [*The Political History of the Normalization of Japan-China Diplomatic Relations*], Nagoya Daigaku Shuppankai: Nagoya, Japan, 2011, pp. 404-410; M. Fukuda, "[Chūgoku to Kanada no kokkō seijō-ka kōshō](#)" [Negotiations towards the normalization of China-Canada diplomatic relations], *Kokusai Seiji*, Vol 195, 2019, pp. 39-40; E. Fardella, "[Negotiating Sino-Italian Normalization, 1968-1970](#)", *The Wilson Center*, 22 October 2014.

⁵⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 'Joint Communiqué of the Government of Japan and the Government of the People's Republic of China', 1972.

⁵⁸ Global Affairs Canada, [G7 Foreign Ministers' statement on China's large-scale military drills around Taiwan](#), 06 April 2025.

stability, including the use of force or coercion'⁵⁹, meaning also of Taiwanese moves towards *de jure* independence.

Since 2016, though, China has resorted to 'One China' principle 'lawfare', starting from its non-negotiable stance on the '1992 Consensus' coupled by persuasion and pressure campaigns *vis-à-vis* its diplomatic counterparts and private corporations to remove references to Taiwan. Japan and the USA have also moved the goalposts of the cross-Straits status quo. In recent years, Tokyo has dropped earlier references to 'lack of support for Taiwan's independence'⁶⁰ and denies it has a 'One China' policy, with implications for G7 statements⁶¹. With effect from 2025, the USA and Japan provide 'support for Taiwan's meaningful participation in international organisations'⁶² without specifying whether statehood is required or not, although the USA had subtly changed this stance already by 2024 under the Biden administration⁶³. The USA has followed Japan's moves to remove language on a lack of support for Taiwan's independence⁶⁴. This shift may be a form of deterrence lawfare to provide Taiwan capacity for its own security, buttress its status as a state according to the 'constitutive theory' of statehood (and thus without exclusively resting its claim of statehood on the 'declarative theory' – see footnote and section 5 for further details)⁶⁵, and even come to its defence. By subtly implying statehood, it may also allow Tokyo to invoke the right of collective self-defence, aiding 'friendly countries'. However, these moves are unhelpful because they repudiate the foundations of strategic ambiguity and, arguably, the 'One China' policies canon of both Japan and the USA.

⁵⁹ Italics added. Global Affairs Canada, [G7 Foreign Ministers' statement on China's large-scale military drills around Taiwan](#), 06 April 2025.

⁶⁰ M.Z. Yang, [Ri yedang guohui yiyuan pi Zhitian furen 'Tai du' zhuzhang, Ri Tai minzhong juxing kangyi huodong](#) [Japanese opposition lawmakers criticize Prime Minister Kishida's stance on Taiwan independence; Taiwanese groups in Japan stage protests]. *Central News Agency*, 06 December 2022. Compare with: Diet of Japan, 'Shūgiin. 2023. "Dai 211-kai Kokkai Shitsumon Dai 55-gō" [211th Session of the Diet, Question No. 55], Question, 24 April 2005; Sankei News, 'Nichū shunō kaidan "goyaku" de Fukuda shushō no kaoiro ippen', [At the Japan–China summit, a 'mistranslation' dramatically changed Prime Minister Fukuda's expression], 29 December 2007.

⁶¹ Since August 2022, in G7 negotiations Japanese government representatives deny that Japan has a 'One China' policy, leading to joint statements that reflect Japan's new stance. Interviews with European diplomats, 2022–25. The change happened, quietly, likely ahead of 2022 and around the time of the second Abe administration, in turn echoing policies during the first one (2006–2007): A. Shinbun, 'Chin Sōtō, 'hantai shinai Nihon' ni kansha – "Taiwan" na de Kokuren kamei e jūmin tōhyō', [President Chen thanks 'not-opposing Japan' – the referendum for the accession of 'Taiwan' to the UN], 06 September 2007.

⁶² The White House, [United States–Japan Joint Leaders' Statement](#), Statement, 07 February 2025.

⁶³ Please refer to the first page of the introduction for evidence (including in footnote).

⁶⁴ Reuters, [U.S. drops website wording on not supporting Taiwan independence](#), 16 February 2025. As of 08 July 2025, the US Department of State's [Taiwan Fact Sheet](#) containing this changed language has disappeared, suggesting a rethink of some of its wording in the US government, not unlike earlier instances in 2024 when it disappeared in late September 2024 to resurface, with new wording, in February 2025. According to a search on the Internet Archive, the website was taken down around the end of April 2025.

⁶⁵ The constitutive theory of statehood argues that 'a state exists exclusively by virtue of the recognition of other states'. The declarative theory of statehood, instead, 'holds that an entity becomes a state solely by operation of law, independent of any formality of recognition'. M. J. West and A. Insisa, [Reunifying Taiwan with China through Cross-Straits Lawfare](#), *The China Quarterly*, Vol 257, 2024, p. 189.

Authoritative testimonies and nuances in wording suggest that Tokyo takes a more expansive view than Washington, also for the aforementioned domestic legal arguments, and has worked in lockstep with the US government⁶⁶.

Regarding the USA, Washington enlisted and empowered China in its grand strategy of Soviet containment, starting with Nixon's surprise 1972 visit to Beijing, which prepared the ground for the 1979 USA-PRC normalisation of diplomatic relations. Recognition of the PRC elicited a balancing act from the USA Congress in 1979: the Taiwan Relations Act, the bedrock of USA-Taiwan relations. This law, unique among G7 members, mandates the USA's government to help Taiwan defend itself, notably through sales of defence articles and services (selected at the discretion of the executive). Nonetheless, the language is deliberately ambiguous when it comes to the *use* of force, providing America with the right to come to the rescue of Taiwan without implying a mandate. Moreover, the US government's assurances made in 1982 allow for an ongoing supply of defensive weapons to Taiwan⁶⁷. This policy is grounded in the afore-mentioned rights, including the broad principles that reject the use of force to resolve international conflicts, especially those aimed at changing borders and pledges contained in the three USA-China Joint Communiqués (1972, 1979 and 1982), where both nations agreed not to pursue hegemony and China would work toward a peaceful resolution of the Taiwan issue. China's military build-up, its coercive strategies across the region, including across the Strait, have thus allowed Washington to legitimise its step-change in weapons sales. At the same time, allowing high-level American officials to visit the island, as witnessed during Trump 1.0, may strain the 'One China' policy, as would pursuing a 'One China/One Taiwan' policy, which runs against the letter of the 1982 USA-China Joint Communiqué.

In short, under the umbrella of stated 'One China' policies, there is room for supporting Taiwan's resilience and democracy. For European players this includes provision of dual-use components, security capacity-building, intelligence exchanges, and more personnel stationed in Taiwan's unofficial representative office, provided that these measures do not constitute a *public* challenge to Beijing⁶⁸, especially if executive bodies, such as the European Commission, the EEAS, the European Council and the Council of the EU, are involved. The European Parliament may well engage in parliamentary diplomacy and even pursue policies that suggest the existence of 'One China, One Taiwan', but executive bodies representing the government (hence the state or the international organisation) ought not to. Executive bodies should instead tread with care and along the 'One China' policy construct. Doing otherwise would ultimately be unhelpful, not unlike sole condemnations of changes of the status quo by force alone, because it hollows out the foundation of strategic ambiguity, effectively taking sides. The EU should be mindful of heightening Beijing's perceived changes to the *de jure* status quo, hastening its encroachment on Taiwan.

⁶⁶ S. Okuhara, '[Kokkai giin yo, naze Chūgoku ni ikanai no ka](#)' – Abe Shinzō Seiken-go o ureu Tarumi Hideo, zen-Chūgoku taishi (jō)' ['Members of the Diet, why don't you go to China?' – Hideo Tarumi, former ambassador to China, reflects on the post-Abe Shinzō administration – Part 1], *Sankei Shinbun*, 07 July 2025; On the small rhetorical divide between Japan and the US position, the afore-mentioned, scrapped US Department of State's Taiwan Fact Sheet, published shortly after the USA-Japan summit, removed wording according to which the USA does not support Taiwan's independence, but also specified 'support Taiwan's meaningful participation in international organizations, including membership *where applicable* (emphasis added)'. The italicised qualification suggests a modicum of prudence.

⁶⁷ US Department of State, [State cable subject: Taiwan arms sales \(Cable No. 200235\)](#), 10 July 1982; US Department of State, [State cable subject: Assurances for Taiwan \(Cable No. 200235\)](#), 17 August 1982.

⁶⁸ R. C. Bush, '[To Respect the One-China Policy, Here's What the Trump Administration Should and Shouldn't Do](#)', *Brookings Institution*, 03 April 2017.

Assurances in the form of the 'One China' policy will also prevent the worsening of EU-China and cross-Strait relations, all while competing with China and supporting Taiwan.

Under the first Trump-Pence administration, the USA's 2018 Strategic Framework for the Indo-Pacific suggested a zero-sum assessment not only of China's capabilities and (global) intentions, but also of the importance of Taiwan⁶⁹. According to its lead author, Matthew Pottinger, Xi 'prioritizes "unification" over "peace" and seeks "the end of the status quo"' ⁷⁰. As a result, '[enhancing] combat-credible U.S. military presence and posture in the Indo-Pacific region' ⁷¹ dovetailed with prescriptions from the 2018 National Defense Strategy (NDS), from which was born the new force posture, joint force and allies-based 'integrated deterrence' policies that eventually took a neater and more coherent shape under the Biden-Harris administration⁷². According to one of the two penholders of the NDS, Elbridge Colby, the USA had to implement a denial strategy across the first island chain with regional players and prevent a slippery slope of regional subordination to Beijing⁷³. While prescriptions from 'primacist' Pottinger do differ from those built on the more traditional balance-of-power basis, as in the 2018 NDS, the policy output from Trump 1.0 translated into an emphasis on deterrence by denial across the first island chain, mirroring China's own A2/AD strategy. Specifically, the USA and its allies aim to deny China's ability to project power and roam freely, protected by the People's Liberation Army's (PLA) land-based assets. In addition, by fostering Taiwan's resilience and enlisting allies such as Japan, Australia and the Philippines in said 'strategy of denial', US policy-makers signal to Beijing that a Taiwan contingency will be a prolonged one, with substantial economic and military costs for China as well. As a result, the American government routinised and expanded military assistance to Taiwan – until then a carefully calendarized political dance – and changed its approach in favour of what is colloquially known as a 'porcupine strategy' that would make the island more resilient and capable of withstanding Chinese aggression via asymmetric (and cheaper than 'prestige' weapon systems preferred by ROC Armed Forces) means, along with deployment of new American units and assets in the region, as well as requests for greater alliance burden-sharing in the first island chain (see below).

⁶⁹ US National Security Council, [U.S. Strategic Framework for the Indo-Pacific](#), February 2018, declassified on 05 January 2021. According to the document, "[Enabling] Taiwan to develop an effective asymmetric defense strategy and capabilities that will help ensure its security, freedom from coercion, resilience, and ability to engage China on its own terms" was a key objective that implied "(1) *denying* China sustained air and sea dominance inside the 'first island chain' in a conflict; (2) *defending* the first-island-chain nations, including Taiwan."

⁷⁰ M. Pottinger, '[Taiwan wa hontō ni ayau](#)' [Taiwan is truly in danger], *Bungei Shunjū PLUS*, 9 May 2025. The same analysis is reflected in the aforementioned US Strategic Framework for the Indo-Pacific, according to which 'China will take increasingly assertive steps to compel unification with Taiwan'.

⁷¹ US National Security Council, [U.S. Strategic Framework for the Indo-Pacific](#), February 2018, declassified on 05 January 2021.

⁷² Interview with mid-ranking Taiwanese diplomat, 08 May 2025; US Department of Defense, [Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy](#), 18 January 2018.

⁷³ E. Colby, [The Strategy of Denial. American Defense in an Age of Great Power Conflict](#), Yale University Press: London, United Kingdom, 2021; see also this book available only in Japanese: E. Colby, '[Ajia Fāsuto: Shin Amerika no Gunji Senryaku](#)' [Asia First: The New American Military Strategy], Bungeishunjū: Tokyo, Japan, nd.

China's crackdown on Hong Kong's semi-autonomy in 2019-20 and the COVID-19 crisis compounded cross-Strait and USA-China tensions, qualifying as points of no return in both sets of relations, if not of China's engagement with the enlarged West as a whole⁷⁴. Beijing's handling of the Hong Kong protests further strengthened the DPP's hand, given that Tsai won her re-election in January 2020 after having consistently trailed back in polls until the outbreak of the protests in summer 2019⁷⁵. The Biden administration, in turn, inherited and built on its predecessors' work in the military and diplomatic domains, adding nuance in the management of cross-Strait relations. Washington and Tokyo lobbied for language aimed at the preservation of peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait in multilateral settings, including the G7. Both states' new force posture and doctrine changes – including joint operational plans in a Taiwan contingency, a huge step in the USA-Japan alliance – were rolled out during that period, amidst a worsening security climate, characterised by growingly complex military exercises on all sides, pessimistic official assessments suggesting an incoming Taiwan invasion (also aimed at budget appropriation goals), as well as the deterioration of cross-Strait and USA-China relations following Speaker of the US House of Representatives – the third highest office in the country – Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan on August 2-3, 2022⁷⁶. By the end of the Biden administration, government-wide message discipline, clear-eyed engagement with China took the lead, in conjunction with the election of the DPP candidate Lai Ching-te to the Presidential office in 2024.

The above-mentioned dynamic has led to the intensification of China's cross-Strait coercion below the threshold of a direct kinetic confrontation and outright aggression. Chinese espionage and infiltration, long-standing issues in Taiwan, have intensified. Political warfare may have a compounding effect on the island's security given China's reach in the cyber and information domains, hence its ability to impact the integrity of electoral processes, and more broadly, Taiwan's socio-political fabric⁷⁷. This climate of insecurity, in turn, is further affected by the challenge of grey zone operations targeting soft and hard infrastructure in the territories controlled by Taipei⁷⁸. The complex post-Cold War picture, therefore, has given way to a more securitised cross-Strait relationship, one that also needs to be understood in the broader USA-China relationship. Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine has cemented the securitisation process, mobilising Western public opinion in support of Taiwan, a fellow democracy, backed by an oft-repeated strategic analogy: 'today's Ukraine could be tomorrow's East Asia'. This dynamic has been particularly relevant in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), where perceptions of China had already soured in the years immediately preceding Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. This was a byproduct of

⁷⁴ G. Pugliese, '[COVID-19 and the Reification of the US-China "Cold War"](#)', *Asia-Pacific Journal*, Vol 18, No 15, 2020; G. Pugliese, '[Italy and China: Much Ado About an MoU](#)', *East Asia Institute at the National University of Singapore*, Background brief, No 1565, 2020, pp. 01-22.

⁷⁵ A. Insisa, '[Taiwan 2019 and the 2020 Elections: Tsai Ing-wen's Triumph](#)', *Asia Major*, Vol 30, 2019, pp. 193-195.

⁷⁶ C. Wallace and G. Pugliese, '[Japan 2022: Putin and Abe Shocks Thwart Kishida's Enjoyment of Three Golden Years Despite Major Defence Overhaul](#)', *Asia Major*, Vol 33, 2022, pp.79-129.

⁷⁷ C.-L. Hung et al., '[AI Disinformation Attacks and Taiwan's Responses during the 2024 Presidential Election](#)', *Thomson Foundation*, 2024.

⁷⁸ D. Grossman, '[The Chinese Communist Party's Gray Zone Tactics Against Taiwan](#)', *Global Taiwan Institute*, 2025.

dismay over tangible economic benefits in the China-led '17+1' cooperation forum, and of China's informal sanctions to punish Lithuania's decision to deepen unofficial relations with Taiwan in 2021 (see section 3). Diffuse perceptions of China as a key 'enabler' of Russian criminal invasion of Ukraine, especially strong in CEE countries, have created a hard core of support for Taiwan within Europe, at a time when CEE states have rebalanced their geostrategic relevance within the EU. Leaving aside the murkier status of the ROC in international law⁷⁹, compared to Ukraine, the sections above and below suggest that dynamics across the Taiwan Strait are typical of a security dilemma, according to which China's behaviour originates from a complex mix of overconfidence and insecurity.

Finally, it is worth noting that the 2024 elections have ushered in a period of 'twisted co-habitation' between Lai, a DPP President, and a Legislative Yuan led by a KMT relative majority supported by the populist Taiwan People's Party (TPP), suggesting that societal and political cleavages within Taiwan remain profound. The KMT and the TPP have: approved massive expenditure cuts, including substantial freezes of defence-related funds (later released); criticised President Lai's approach to national security, including his government's newly unveiled Whole of Society Defence Resilience initiative; blocked judicial appointments; and attempted to wrestle away powers from the DPP-controlled executive branch to the legislative branch. Political divisions go above and beyond the management of cross-Strait relations (and tensions), but this policy issue has gained prominence in recent years. On the one hand, surveys sympathetic to the deep-green camp show that an overwhelming and growing number of Taiwanese oppose unification with China, and the majority of Taiwanese respondents express support for cooperation with the EU, in contrast to less than half who are for cooperation with China⁸⁰. On the other hand, the belief within the pan-blue camp that some of Lai's measures may stoke Cross-Strait tensions is real and a measure of Taiwan's post-modern prioritisation of stability and bread-and-butter issues, including vested economic interests in the mainland⁸¹. Finally, and in connection with the above, the very fact that public opinion polls' outlets reflect entrenched political cleavages (and biases) suggests the need to treat such data with a dose of healthy scepticism.

⁷⁹ J. R. Crawford, *The Creation of States in International Law*, Oxford University Press: New York, USA, 2006.

⁸⁰ Taiwanese Public Opinion Foundation, [Special Report: Taiwanese Preferences on Taiwan's Political Future](#), 14 February 2025; R. Turcsányi et. al, [Public opinion in the Indo-Pacific: Divided on China, cheering for US & EU](#), *Central European Institute of Asian Studies*, 2022.

⁸¹ TVBS Poll Center, ['Minzhong dui Lai zongtong guo'an 17 xiang celüe kanfa min diao'](#) [Opinion poll on public perceptions of President Lai's 17 national security measures], 18 March 2025, p. 3.

3 History and state of play of EU-Taiwan relations

The history of EU relations with Taiwan is inextricably connected to the evolution of European states' relations with the ROC and the PRC throughout the Cold War. In 1951, two years after the end of China's Civil War, a first snapshot of European states' position over the issue of diplomatic recognition shows how Cold War geopolitical divisions shaped their alignment, albeit with relevant exceptions. The Eastern Bloc states recognised the PRC, while a majority of Western European states, allied with the USA within NATO, recognised the ROC. Yet, American allies such as the United Kingdom (UK), as well as the Netherlands, Norway and Denmark, decided to recognise the PRC. Some 'neutral' states such as Switzerland, Liechtenstein, Sweden and Finland also recognised the PRC, while West Germany represented a unique case by refusing to recognise either Taipei or Beijing. It is against this backdrop that the ROC attempted for the first time to establish contacts with the European Community in 1961. Two member states of the European Community opposed this request – the Netherlands and France⁸². This diplomatic landscape first changed in 1964, when France, pushing an autonomous foreign policy from the USA and NATO allies, switched diplomatic recognition from the ROC to the PRC. Whilst Taipei was able to sign a short-lived agreement on the textile sector with the EC in 1970⁸³, it was Beijing that eventually obtained a succession of diplomatic victories against the backdrop of the PRC's own accession to the UN and the ROC's expulsion in 1971, and of American President Nixon's momentous visit to China the following year. By 1979, and still to date, the only state in Europe still recognising the ROC was the Vatican City. A consequence of the PRC's 'diplomatic victory' in Europe in the 1970s was the proliferation of multiple 'One China' policies, which organically emerged from the complex bilateral processes that led to the establishment of diplomatic ties between single European states and the PRC. As a result, the European 'One China' policies can be said to differ from each other based on the presence of multiple criteria: whether they explicitly accept Beijing's own 'One China' principle; whether they recognise the existence of a 'One China'; whether they recognise the PRC as the 'sole legitimate government of China'; and whether they include statements explicitly recognising Taiwan as 'part of China'⁸⁴. Box 1, in section 2 of this paper, examines in depth the significance and nuances of 'One China' policies as *evolving* political constructs, focusing on the positions of G7 members.

Taipei responded to the loss of its diplomatic foothold in Europe with the launch of a campaign aiming at expanding informal ties with countries that had switched recognition to China⁸⁵. Multiple Western European states established trade bureaus broadly modelled on Japan's own trade office in Taipei, established in 1972 after Tokyo's normalisation of relations with Beijing. Yet, while Taipei's total diplomacy guaranteed a degree of engagement with Western European states, it did not translate into any meaningful gain with the EC. In 1975, Beijing pushed for establishing diplomatic ties with the European Community during a visit by then Vice-President Sir Christopher Soames.

⁸² C. Tubilewicz, '[Europe in Taiwan's Post-Cold War Foreign Relations](#)', *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, Vol 18, 2007, p. 426.

⁸³ C. Tubilewicz, '[Europe in Taiwan's Post-Cold War Foreign Relations](#)', 2007.

⁸⁴ S. Hofstede, '[One Europe, Many Policies: Balancing EU Relations with Taiwan and China](#)', *Fondation pour la recherche stratégique*, 2025, p. 5.

⁸⁵ C. Tubilewicz, '[Europe in Taiwan's Post-Cold War Foreign Relations](#)', *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, Vol 18, 2007, p. 417.

Noticeably, Soames' speech to the European Parliament after his visit to Beijing in the same year is considered the foundational document in the articulation of the 'One China' policy of the European Community and of its successor, the EU⁸⁶. Soames stated that, in response to pressing enquiries over the Taiwan issue by the PRC delegation, he made clear that 'matters such as the recognition of states did not come within the responsibility of the Community'. Soames further added that he had explained to Chinese interlocutors that 'the Community does not entertain any official relations with Taiwan or have any agreements with it', in lockstep with the 'positions adopted at various times by all the Member States'⁸⁷. The following negotiations between China and the European Community eventually led to a bilateral trade agreement between the two sides, signed in February 1978⁸⁸. The consequences for the ROC were significant. Taipei was excluded from the Community's developmental assistance programmes, and its exports did not benefit from any special treatment in the framework of the Generalised System of Preferences⁸⁹.

Both the European Community and some of its Member States eventually tested the limits of their 'One China' policies. In 1981, the Community restarted informal talks with the ROC on economic issues, albeit according to a minimal agenda⁹⁰. The same year, Belgian and Taiwanese private companies instituted the first-ever bilateral committee to promote economic cooperation, an initiative eventually followed by other Community members⁹¹. Whilst neither initiative encountered a stern response, Beijing did change its position. For instance, the Netherlands decided to sell two diesel submarines to the ROC⁹². As a result, Beijing launched a boycott of the Rotterdam port, stopped the issue of visas to Dutch nationals and downgraded bilateral diplomatic relations. This clearly signalled that emerging economic ties could not translate into the procurement of major military platforms without severe repercussions. However, these events constituted isolated exceptions to the broader trend that characterised most of the 1980s, namely the continuing expansion of diplomatic and economic ties between the Community and its member states on one side and the PRC on the other. While Community members' trade with the ROC remained larger than that with PRC during the 1980s, the prospects of a sustained engagement with China, especially considering the economic reforms and the 'opening up' of the country officially launched in 1978, were increasingly attractive⁹³.

Yet, various processes unfolding between the late 1980s and the early 1990s converged to provide a new direction in the relations between the European Community and its member states, the ROC

⁸⁶ S. Hofstede, '[One Europe, Many Policies: Balancing EU Relations with Taiwan and China](#)', *Fondation pour la recherche stratégique*, 2025, p. 4.

⁸⁷ Archive of European Integration, '[Speech by Sir Christopher Soames, Vice-President of the Commission during a Parliamentary Debate on China: Strasbourg, Wednesday, 18 June 1975](#)', 18 June 1975.

⁸⁸ Archive of European Integration, 'The People's Republic of China and the European Economic Community', 1979, p. 3.

⁸⁹ C. Tubilewicz, '[Europe in Taiwan's Post-Cold War Foreign Relations](#)', *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, Vol 18, 2007, p. 426.

⁹⁰ C. Tubilewicz, '[Europe in Taiwan's Post-Cold War Foreign Relations](#)', 2007, pp. 426-427.

⁹¹ C. Tubilewicz, '[Europe in Taiwan's Post-Cold War Foreign Relations](#)', 2007, p. 418.

⁹² C. Tubilewicz, '[Europe in Taiwan's Post-Cold War Foreign Relations](#)', 2007, p. 434.

⁹³ J.-P. Cabestan, '[The Taiwan Issue in Europe-China Relations: An Irritant More Than Leverage](#)', in D. Shambaugh et al., (eds.), [China-Europe Relations: Perceptions, Policies and Prospects](#), Routledge: New York, USA, 2007, p. 86.

and the PRC. The Tiananmen Square suppression in 1989 triggered a reassessment of China's political trajectory in Europe, until then informed by expectations of a Chinese 'democratic evolution'. With avenues for economic cooperation with Beijing temporarily closed during the PRC's international isolation between 1989 and 1991⁹⁴, Community members began to re-engage the ROC with new vigour. The timing was favourable as Taiwan's economy continued to grow, and with it, the island's need to modernise and expand infrastructure to sustain its export-based economic model⁹⁵. These developments, in turn, drove European Foreign Direct Investments (FDIs) on the island throughout the 1990s. Especially during the period of China's international isolation after the tragic events in and around Tiananmen Square, the ROC was able to obtain some significant albeit short-lived successes. Many Western European countries upgraded their informal diplomatic presence in Taiwan, expanding consular services and beginning to staff active diplomatic offices. At the same time, ROC trade bureaus in Europe began to incorporate the moniker 'Taipei' in their official names⁹⁶. More importantly, the ROC was able to conclude a number of arms deals with Western European countries. Among them, the French case is particularly important because of the weapon system procured. In 1992, Paris concluded the sale of the 60 Mirage 2000-5 fighter jets to the ROC Air Force. As in the case of the Netherlands' sale of submarines in 1981, France decided to mend relations with Beijing, as evidenced by the aforementioned 1994 joint communiqué (see Box 1 in section 2), after having tested the limits of its own 'One China' policy and meeting Beijing's fierce backlash⁹⁷.

Even as relations between Beijing and West European states normalised by the second half of the 1990s, Taipei continued to expand its unofficial ties in Europe. ROC ministers conducted various 'functional' visits throughout this period, strictly concerning economic and socio-cultural issues in bilateral relations. From this perspective, ROC Prime Minister Lien Chan's visits to EU Member States Austria and Ireland respectively in 1995 and 1997, as well the official statement of no opposition to ministerial-level visits by then German Foreign Minister Klaus Kinkel in 1996, are important entry points in mapping what had been previously considered acceptable in the context of 'One China' policies. This notwithstanding, political values remained in the backseat while these processes unfolded, as Cabestan notes. The ROC's own gradual democratisation process, originally started with the lifting of Martial Law in 1987 and concluded with the first direct election of the President in 1996⁹⁸, did not lead member states of the European Community to any reassessment of their 'One China' policies. In fact, just as Taiwan completed its democratisation process, cross-

⁹⁴ On the diplomatic aftermath of the June 4th Incident, see: J. W. Garver, *China's Quest: The History of the Foreign Relations of the People's Republic of China*, Oxford University Press: New York, USA, 2016, pp. 485-504.

⁹⁵ C. Tubilewicz, 'Europe in Taiwan's Post-Cold War Foreign Relations', *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, Vol 18, 2007, p. 422.

⁹⁶ C. Tubilewicz, 'Europe in Taiwan's Post-Cold War Foreign Relations', 2007.

⁹⁷ J.-P. Cabestan, 'The Taiwan Issue in Europe-China Relations: An Irritant More Than Leverage', in D. Shambaugh et al., (eds.), *China-Europe Relations: Perceptions, Policies and Prospects*, Routledge: New York, USA, 2007, pp. 87-88.

⁹⁸ On the gradual process of democratization, see: D. Roy, *Taiwan: A Political History*, Cornell University Press: Ithaca, USA, 2003, pp. 164-182.

Strait relations with Beijing were expanded, driven by Taiwanese firms' relocation to mainland China and the emergence of China-centric supply chains in consumer electronics⁹⁹.

At the same time, the collapse of the Eastern Bloc, the fall of the Soviet Union and the subsequent dismantling of Yugoslavia provided other elements of dynamism in relations between Taiwan and Europe during the late 1980s and 1990s. These geopolitical overhauls put on the international stage new state actors invariably in dire need of economic support and, in certain cases, ideologically favourable to Taiwan due to militant anti-communism. The ROC explored various avenues of diplomatic engagement with these new polities, even briefly establishing diplomatic relations with the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (now North Macedonia) between 1999 and 2001. In virtually all cases with the former Eastern Bloc, the former Soviet Union and the former Yugoslav states, Taipei fell into a common pattern of projecting unrealistic and unsustainable promises of economic support in exchange for diplomatic recognition, leading to Beijing eventually securing diplomatic relations with these states¹⁰⁰.

However, the single most important development in relations between the European Community/EU and the ROC throughout this period was the latter's admission to the WTO in 2002. This was achieved under the moniker 'Separate Customs Territory of Taiwan, Penghu, Kinmen and Matsu', following a lengthy process tracing back to Taipei's original request to join the GATT in 1990. Joint membership in the WTO provided for the first time a shared institutional arena where the two entities could officially interact. As early as Taipei applied to join the GATT, negotiations between European Community officials and ROC officials on trade began to unfold, leading to the first-ever official visit by a European Community representative to Taiwan, that of European Commission Vice President Martin Bangemann in 1992 (albeit in his official capacity as Chairman of the Friedrich Naumann Foundation)¹⁰¹.

Other important steps included the establishment of the EU-Taiwan industrial roundtables in 1996, grouping business actors and officials from both sides, as well as the signing in 1998 of a bilateral agreement by the Vice President of the European Commission, Leon Brittan and the ROC Minister for Economic Affairs, Wang Chih-kang. The culmination of these engagements was the establishment in 2003 of the European Trade and Representative Office in Taipei, following the ROC's final admission to the WTO in 2002. The EU argued that its need to monitor Taipei's compliance with the 1998 WTO accession agreement justified the establishment of the office in Taiwan, notwithstanding Beijing's opposition¹⁰². As in the case of relations between Western

⁹⁹ See: M. Kawakami, '[Competition and Collaboration in East Asia Firms in the Smartphone Supply Chains](#)', in E. Solingen (ed.), *Geopolitics, Supply Chains, and International Relations in East Asia*, Cambridge University Press: New York, USA, 2021, pp. 85-93.

¹⁰⁰ C. Tubilewicz, *[Taiwan and Post-Communist Europe: Shopping for Allies](#)*, Routledge: New York, USA, 2007.

¹⁰¹ Wang W., *[Oumeng-Taiwan-Zhongguo sanbian guanxi pouxi](#)* [An Anatomy of the Trilateral Relation between the EU, Taiwan, and China], Wunan tushu chubanshe: Taipei, Taiwan, 2008, pp. 193-195, as cited in P. L. Hsieh, '[Rethinking Non-Recognition: The EU Investment Agreement with Taiwan under the One-China Policy](#)', *Leiden Journal of International Law*, Vol 33, No 3, 2020.

¹⁰² C. Tubilewicz, '[Europe in Taiwan's Post-Cold War Foreign Relations](#)', *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, Vol 18, 2007, pp. 426-427.

European states and the ROC discussed earlier, mapping these interactions provides a repertoire of interactions grounded in the 'One China' policy of the EU that could inform contemporary interactions between the EU and Taipei.

To conclude this examination of the period between the 1990s and the early 2000s, it is also important to outline the role of the European Parliament in EU-Taiwan relations. On the one hand, since the 1990s, the Parliament has emerged as the EU institution more consistently in favour of strengthening and expanding relations with Taiwan and voicing support for its autonomy. The Parliament has issued a number of resolutions supporting Taiwan's participation in international organisations where statehood is not required, urged closer cooperation between other EU institutions and Taiwan, while promoting inter-parliamentary diplomacy through regular visits. It has also played a vocal role in condemning Chinese actions during the 'Third Strait Crisis' of 1996, during which Beijing launched intimidating military exercises ahead of the direct election of Lee Teng-hui as ROC President¹⁰³. On the other hand, the European Parliament's ancillary role in the making of the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy made it impossible to translate these inputs into real-world policy.

The year 2003 constituted both the zenith and a turning point in relations between the EU and Taiwan. This very same year, the EU and China announced their comprehensive strategic partnership, and Chinese authorities issued their first *EU Policy Paper*. The document put Taiwan and the 'One China' issue front and centre in China-EU relations. It defined Beijing's 'One China' principle as 'an important political cornerstone underpinning China-EU relations', highlighted that '[t]he proper handling of the Taiwan question is essential for a steady growth of China-EU relations', and stated that the EU should 'prohibit any visit by any Taiwan political figures to the EU or its member countries under whatever name or pretext', and refuse 'to engage in any contact or exchange of an official or governmental nature with Taiwan authorities'. Beijing's desiderata also included a request 'not to support Taiwan's accession to or participation in any international organization whose membership requires statehood' and to refrain from the sale of 'any weapon, equipment, goods, materials or technology that can be used for military purposes'¹⁰⁴. These preconditions were repeated, with slightly different language, in successive iterations of Beijing's *EU Policy Papers* in 2014 and 2018¹⁰⁵.

Against this backdrop, the EU, in lockstep with its Member States, was in broad terms ready to sideline its relations with Taiwan, in light of a booming trade relationship with China and a geopolitical environment shaped by neoliberal globalisation, favouring a de-securitisation of relations between the two sides. A partial exception to this trend was the 2015 *Trade for All* strategy issued by the European Commission, which promised to 'explore launching negotiations on investment' with Taiwan – albeit in the context of 'the investment provisions under negotiation

¹⁰³ C. Tubilewicz, 'Europe in Taiwan's Post-Cold War Foreign Relations', 2007, p. 428.

¹⁰⁴ PRC State Council Information Office, [China's EU Policy Paper](#), October 2003, p. 3.

¹⁰⁵ PRC State Council Information Office, [Policy Paper on EU: Deepen China-EU Comprehensive Strategic Partnership for Mutual Benefit and Win-Win Cooperation](#), 02 April 2014; PRC State Council Information Office, [China's Policy Paper on the European Union](#), 18 December 2018.

with China'¹⁰⁶. The positive trajectory of the USA-China bilateral relation, especially following the 9/11 attacks and deepening of economic relations between the two sides in the aftermath of the 2008 Global Financial Crisis, also provided a decisive contribution in shaping the divergent paths of the EU's relations with Beijing and Taipei. Taiwanese domestic politics and cross-Straits policies also contributed to this environment. Primarily, the DPP administration led by Chen Shui-bian alienated American (and European) partners because of its open willingness to challenge Beijing on the issue of 'Taiwan independence'¹⁰⁷. Successively, the KMT's return to power with Ma Ying-jeou in 2008 led to an about-face in cross-Straits policy, with Taipei authorities deciding to deepen and accelerate socio-economic integration with China, while underplaying the long-term consequences of this approach for the island's autonomy¹⁰⁸. The policy pursued by the Ma administration and Beijing's willingness to accommodate Taipei while working for peaceful unification, in turn, further diminished the risks of frictions between China and the EU over Taiwan. By 2015, scholars in leading academic journals in international relations openly questioned whether the Taiwan Strait was 'still a flash point'¹⁰⁹.

The EU and its Member States were slow to react to the rapidly changing geopolitics of the first island chain under the Trump administration. The second half of the 2010s featured a gradual reassessment of the relation with Beijing, which culminated in the 2019 document *The EU and China: A Strategy Outlook*, which for the first time framed Beijing as 'a cooperation partner', 'an economic competitor', and 'a systemic rival'. Yet the drivers of this reassessment were primarily economic¹¹⁰, rather than linked to the changing geopolitics of the Asia-Pacific. Nevertheless, EU institutions remained focused on finalising the Comprehensive Agreement on Investment with China, the negotiations of which lasted from 2013 to 2020. The arrival of the Tsai administration in 2016 did not fundamentally change this dynamic, as the new administration initially focused on engaging with the new Trump-Pence administration in the USA and on re-energising economic relations with regional partners under its first flagship initiative, the 'New Southbound Policy'¹¹¹. As a result, the EU remained consequently on the sidelines while the triangular relation between Beijing, Taipei, and Washington rapidly changed under much of the first Trump-Pence administration. An exception to this overall trend was the launch of the EU-Taiwan Industrial Policy Dialogue in 2016, involving high-level officials from both sides.

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic marked a fundamental turning point in the relation. Pandemic politics and the advent of the Biden-Harris administration accelerated the USA-EU realignment over China, just as relations between the EU and China rapidly soured. Criticism of Beijing in Europe mounted following its harsh suppression of the Hong Kong protests and the

¹⁰⁶ European Commission, [Trade for All: Towards a More Responsible Trade and Investment Policy](#), October 2015.

¹⁰⁷ M. J. Green, [By More Than Providence: Grand Strategy and American Power in Asia since 1783](#), Columbia University Press: New York, USA, 2017, pp. 495-496.

¹⁰⁸ A. Insisa, '[Taiwan 2019 and the 2020 Elections: Tsai Ing-wen's Triumph](#)', *Asia Major*, Vol 30, 2019, pp. 193-195.

¹⁰⁹ S. L. Kastner, '[Is the Taiwan Strait Still a Flash Point?; Rethinking the Prospect for Armed Conflict between China and Taiwan](#)', *International Security*, Vol 40, No 3, 2015, pp. 54-92.

¹¹⁰ T. Wright, [Europe Changes Its Mind on China](#), *Brookings Institution*, 2020.

¹¹¹ A. Insisa, '[Taiwan 2017: Stalemate on the Strait](#)', *Asia Major* Vol 28, 2017, pp. 113-128.

imposition of a draconian national security law ending the region's semi-autonomy, its security and ethnic policies targeting the Uyghur minority in Xinjiang, and its willingness to operate in the information environment of EU Member States to improve its global public image¹¹². These tensions eventually culminated in early 2021, with the EU imposing sanctions targeting individuals and entities over the Xinjiang issue, to which Beijing responded with countersanctions. This round of tit-for-tat sanctions was followed by a momentous European Parliament resolution adopted on 20 May 2021, which effectively froze the ratification of the Comprehensive Agreement on Investment, attributing its block to Beijing's 'actions against the Uyghur people and other ethnic minorities', to 'the crackdown on democracy in Hong Kong', and to 'the increasingly confrontational approach in the Taiwan Strait', ultimately stating that 'EU-China relations may not continue business as usual'¹¹³. The Parliament resolution was consistent with the joint statements between US President Biden and Japanese Prime Minister Suga Yoshihide in April 2021, and with ROK President Moon issued in May, with the Carbis Bay G7 communiqué issued in June, and with the USA-EU summit statement issued the same month, all documents mentioning for the first time 'peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait'¹¹⁴.

Harbingers of the deterioration of EU-China relations and of a new momentum in EU-Taiwan relations, in fact, had already emerged in 2020. Throughout the first year of the pandemic, Members of the European Parliament voiced their support for Taiwan's access to the World Health Assembly (WHA), against Beijing's opposition, while in September 2020, the EU greenlit the launch of the first EU-Taiwan Investment Forum. Geo-economic dynamics unfolding in 2021 marked a further change of gear in the EU-Taiwan relations. The 'chip crunch' affecting global manufacturing during the COVID-19 pandemic, caused by the first mass outbreak in Taiwan and by droughts affecting water provisions to chip plants on the island, revealed to the wider public Europe's dependency on Taiwan's industrial champion, Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC) – the dominant player in the production of advanced chips. It also showed the downsides of supply chains featuring extreme geographic concentration, showing how Taiwan's value in international politics did not reside simply in its geo-strategic significance within the first island chain.

Against this backdrop, EU institutions became even more proactive, now touting Taiwan as a like-minded partner sharing the same democratic values of critical relevance for the union's economic security. The European Parliament played once again a leading role. In September 2021, it adopted the resolution *A New EU-China Strategy*, which, closely echoing the Biden-Suga Joint Leaders' Statement issued in April, defined the 'status quo across the Taiwan Strait ... of critical importance to the EU and its Member States'¹¹⁵. In October, it issued a recommendation to the European

¹¹² EEAS, [Disinformation on Covid-19: Information Environment Assessment](#), SG.AFFGEN.7/LG, 20 April 2020.

¹¹³ European Parliament, [Resolution on Chinese Countersanctions on EU Entities and MEPs and MPs \(2021/2644\(RSP\)\)](#), P9_TA(2021)0255, 20 May 2021.

¹¹⁴ A. Insisa, '[Taiwan 2021: Heightened Geo-Economic Relevance amid Rising Cross-Strait Tensions](#)', *Asia Maior*, Vol 32, 2021, pp. 134-135.

¹¹⁵ European Parliament, [Resolution on a new EU-China strategy \(2021/2023\(INI\)\)](#), P9_TA(2021)0382, 16 September 2021; The White House, [U.S.- Japan Joint Leaders' Statement: 'U.S. – JAPAN GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP FOR A NEW ERA'](#), Statement, 16 April 2021.

Commission to guarantee Taiwan's participation in UN agencies as an observer and to begin negotiations for a bilateral investment agreement¹¹⁶. Finally, in November, the European Parliament sent for the first time an official delegation to Taipei¹¹⁷. The European Commission and the High Representative's *EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific* issued in September, in turn, stated that China's 'display of force' and increasing tensions in the Taiwan Strait 'may have a direct impact on European security and prosperity', committed the union to 'pursue ... deep trade and investment relationships with partners with whom it does not have trade and investment agreement, such as Taiwan', and identified the island as a key partner in building more resilient and diversified supply chains¹¹⁸. The Tsai administration arguably tried to leverage this new phase in the relations to push for a roadmap towards an investment and trade agreement, with ROC Minister of Foreign Affairs Wu Jaushieh visiting Brussels for the first time to hold talks with EU officials. Yet, caution over Beijing's potential response stopped the von der Leyen Commission from establishing an EU-Taiwan trade and technology council similar to those existing with the USA and India¹¹⁹.

Notwithstanding this setback, the Sino-Lithuanian row that erupted in 2021 was evidence of the fundamental shift that had rapidly occurred in the triangular relation between Brussels, Beijing and Taipei. Following its withdrawal from the '17+1' framework of cooperation between Beijing and, mostly, Central and Eastern European states in April, Vilnius decided in November to allow the establishment of a '*Taiwanese* representative office', rather than the more common and politically neutral 'Taipei representative office'. Beijing responded by downgrading the Lithuanian diplomatic representation in China, leading Vilnius to close its embassy in the country. More importantly, while the low trade volume between the two countries shielded Lithuania from a direct punishment, Beijing pressured the German automotive company Continental, a major economic player operating in the Baltic country, to stop using components produced there¹²⁰. This decision transformed a diplomatic row into a litmus test for the EU's capacity to act in concert as a single geo-economic actor, and for Taiwan's ability to expand ties with European countries. The EU not only required a WTO panel to resolve the dispute, but it also unveiled and legitimised in 2023 its Anti-Coercion Instrument to counter economic statecraft targeting a Member State, although the instrument was originally conceived with the Trump-Pence administration in mind¹²¹.

The European Parliament continued to lead the way in support for Taiwan in 2022. In June, it adopted a text condemning Chinese operations within Taiwan's claimed Air Defense Identification

¹¹⁶ European Parliament, [EU-Taiwan Political Relations and Cooperation, \(2021/2041\(INI\)\)](#), P9_TA(2021)0431, 21 October 2021.

¹¹⁷ European Parliament, [European Parliament Delegation Ends Visit to Taiwan](#), Press Release, 05 November 2021.

¹¹⁸ European Commission, [The EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific](#), JOIN(2021) 24 final, 16 September 2021, pp. 3, 7 and 8.

¹¹⁹ F. Bermingham, '[EU Shelves Taiwan Trade Upgrade amid High-Wire Balancing Act on China](#)', *South China Morning Post*, 17 November 2021.

¹²⁰ A. Sytas and J. O'Donnell, '[China Pressures Germany's Continental to Cut Out Lithuania](#)', *Reuters*, 18 December 2021.

¹²¹ European Commission, '[Protecting Against Coercion](#)' webpage, nd. As of summer 2025, the status of the EU-China dispute is still pending and on the way to remain inconclusive, given two separate requests by the European Commission to suspend it. See: A. Stankevičius, '[EU Once Again Asks to Suspend WTO Case over China's Trade with Lithuania](#)', *LRT.lt*, 31 January 2025.

Zone and highlighting 'the threats posed by China to the territorial integrity of Taiwan ... through military actions'¹²². The following month, it adopted the EP's *Indo-Pacific Strategy in the Area of Investment and Trade*, urging the launch of 'a structured dialogue with Taiwan on cooperating in green technology and the digital economy, including the semiconductor industry'¹²³. Yet the key development was the launch, in June 2022, of the first EU-Taiwan 'Trade and Investment Dialogue', an institutionalised ministerial-level dialogue between the ROC Ministry of Economic Affairs and the Commission's Directorate-General for Trade. Developments in 2022, in turn, must be understood in the context of the efforts by the EU and its Member States to secure critical TSMC investment in order to kickstart the reshoring of advanced semiconductor manufacturing on the continent. These efforts, successively framed within the European Chips Act launched in 2023, eventually led to the creation of European Semiconductor Manufacturing Company, a USD 10 billion, TSMC-led joint venture, inaugurated in 2024 and poised to produce advanced chips in Dresden, Germany by 2027¹²⁴. Noticeably, echoing the aforementioned early 1990s dynamics, the ROC was able to leverage deepening economic engagement both at the Union-level and Member State-level to alleviate international isolation, as shown by Minister of Education Bettina Stark-Watzinger's visit to Taiwan on 21 March 2023, the first member of the German cabinet visiting the island since 1997¹²⁵.

EU-Taiwan relations were further consolidated between 2023 and 2024. Official high-level institutional contacts became routinised through the yearly Trade and Investment Dialogue, as well as the Industrial Policy Dialogue, exploring a wide range of issues from semiconductors to renewable energy and energy security, to trade and supply chains resilience, with a distinct focus on the 'security-related aspects of trade and investment' earmarked in the platform's agenda¹²⁶, without however any tangible progress on a bilateral trade and investment agreement, notwithstanding repeated recommendations by the European Parliament to upgrade relations¹²⁷. EU companies became the world's biggest investors in Taiwan, surpassing the USA and totalling circa 57 billion US dollars' worth of cumulative FDI¹²⁸, equivalent to 27 % of EU investment stocks in China, with Dutch capital being the largest among the EU, thanks to interest in offshore windfarms and components for advanced semiconductor manufacturing¹²⁹. The European Parliament, the

¹²² European Parliament, [Resolution on the EU and the Security Challenges in the Indo-Pacific \(2021/2232\(INI\)\)](#), P9_TA(2022)0224, 07 June 2022.

¹²³ European Parliament, [Resolution on the Indo-Pacific Strategy in the Area of Trade and Investment \(2021/2200\(INI\)\)](#), P9_TA(2022)0276, 05 July 2022.

¹²⁴ TSMC, ['ESMC Breaks Ground on Dresden Fab'](#), 20 August 2024.

¹²⁵ Deutsche Welle, ['German Minister Makes Landmark Visit to Taiwan'](#), 21 March 2023.

¹²⁶ European Commission, ['Taiwan: EU Trade Relations with Taiwan. Facts, Figures and Latest Developments'](#), Trade and Economic Security, webpage, nd.

¹²⁷ European Parliament, [Resolution on EU-Taiwan trade and investment relations \(2023/2829\(RSP\)\)](#), P9_TA(2023)0472, 13 December 2023; European Parliament, [Resolution on the security and defence implications of China's influence on critical infrastructure in the European Union \(2023/2072\(INI\)\)](#), P9_TA(2024)0028, 17 January 2024.

¹²⁸ Office of the President, Republic of China (Taiwan), ['President Tsai attends 2023 EU Investment Forum'](#), News release, 12 October 2023.

¹²⁹ Interview with former EU Chamber of Commerce Representative in Asia, 30 April 2025.

European Commission, as well as the EEAS, repeatedly provided rhetorical support to Taiwan, condemning China's sustained military exercises in the waters and air domain surrounding the island, and remarking on the necessity to maintain peace and stability in the Strait¹³⁰. Visits by ROC officials and MPs to the EU and its Member States, too, have become, if not routinised, more common throughout this period¹³¹.

Yet, after a deeper scrutiny, it is possible to appreciate meaningful, pathbreaking developments throughout this period. For instance, the joint statement issued by EEAS Secretary General Stefano Sannino and US Deputy Secretary of State Kurt Campbell on 11 September 2024 in the context of the EU-US Dialogue on China, for instance, beyond now-standard calls for maintaining peace and stability across the Strait and opposition to unilateral attempts to change the status quo, in particular by force or coercion, lacked any reference to the 'One China' policies of the two sides, in contrast with the previous statements issued since 2021¹³². More recently, the lack of language specific to the 'One China' policy in the July 2025 EU-Japan summit suggests that the EU is caving in to requests by Japan and the USA in that regard. But the concomitant lack of reference to Taiwan's inclusion in international organisations *tout court* implies that the EU does *not* endorse a 'One Taiwan' policy, unlike Tokyo and Washington. The European Parliament resolution adopted on 24 October 2024 differed from past exercises for its sharp focus on Chinese distortions of UN Resolution 2758, designed to exclude Taiwan from the UN and its agencies and to establish a legal argument to justify a potential coercive takeover of the island¹³³.

As of 2025, the EU's engagement with Taiwan appears in a transitional phase. On the one hand, the arrival of former Head of the Strategic Communications and Information Analysis Division of the EEAS – the division tasked to counter threats in the information domain – as new Head of Office of the European Economic and Trade Office in Taiwan in September 2024 suggests an implicitly more 'political' mandate, one linked to a cooperation on security issues, albeit within the limits of the union's own 'One China' policy. Hence, the EU has *de facto* upgraded the EU Economic and Trade Office to a higher level in substance, not unlike the meaningful steps taken by other representative offices from G7+ allies in recent years¹³⁴. Within this context, common challenges to the EU and Taiwan in the information domain, such as cyber-attacks and Foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI), as well as similar threats experienced in the 'grey zone', such as attacks to undersea cables, appear to be key areas for cooperation between the two sides,

¹³⁰ EEAS, ['Taiwan: Statement by the Spokesperson on China's Military Drills'](#), Statement, 23 May 2024; European Parliament, [Resolution on the misinterpretation of UN resolution 2758 by the People's Republic of China and its continuous military provocations around Taiwan \(2024/2891\(RSP\)\)](#), P10_TA(2024)0030, 23 October 2024.

¹³¹ Focus Taiwan, ['Taiwan foreign minister meets EU parliamentarians in Brussels'](#), 17 June 2023; Taiwan Today, ['Vice President-elect Hsiao visits Europe to expand cooperation with EU'](#), 25 March 2024; Focus Taiwan, ['Environment ministry to have personnel posted in EU to follow CBAM implementation'](#), 18 September 2024; Focus Taiwan, ['Taiwan foreign minister meets lawmakers at Europe Parliament'](#), 20 November 2024.

¹³² EEAS, ['EU-US: Dialogue on China and Indo-Pacific Consultations'](#), 11 September 2024.

¹³³ European Parliament, [Resolution on the misinterpretation of UN resolution 2758 by the People's Republic of China and its continuous military provocations around Taiwan \(2024/2891\(RSP\)\)](#), P10_TA(2024)0030, 23 October 2024.

¹³⁴ T. Chau, ['US, UK, Japan diplomatic contingents in Taiwan are bigger than ever'](#), *Nikkei Asia*, 08 May 2025.

together with closer coordination on economic security along the perimeter outlined by the EU-Taiwan Trade and Investment Dialogue. On the other hand, the second Trump administration's relative aversion towards cross-theatre allies-based 'integrated deterrence' poses new obstacles to security cooperation between European and Indo-Pacific players, including Taiwan. The Trump administration's de-prioritisation of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and hostility towards liberal democratic values – and Taiwan's need to avoid damaging its relations with the USA¹³⁵, in particular – have eliminated from the public debate critical shared grounds for deepening relations between the EU and Taiwan at an ideational and societal level.

4 Best practices from the USA and other actors: What can the EU learn from G7+ allies?

The EU and its Member States should take stock of developments in cross-Strait relations, learning from the USA and other actors while retaining strategic autonomy and independent thinking. Before analysing the substance of G7+ allies' political, military and diplomatic support of Taiwan, with specific emphasis on the USA (invariably referred to as the 'pioneer' actor¹³⁶), it is necessary to take a step backwards. For instance, the second Trump administration may be aiming to increase military sales to Taiwan substantially, surpassing the record-hitting USD 18.3 billion worth of weapons sold during the first administration¹³⁷, but why and how is it possible for America to support Taiwan with defensive equipment and services, notwithstanding its formal recognition of the PRC in 1979? What about Japan and the G7 allies, which have stepped up their support for Taiwan in recent years? The answer lies in the carefully balanced rhetorical and diplomatic equilibrium in these democracies' 'One China' policies (see Box 1, in section 2).

The American government's redoubled efforts at preserving the cross-Strait geopolitical status quo, starting with the Trump-Pence administration, are commendable, but worth unpacking. The first Trump, Biden and second Trump administrations' approaches work in broad continuity, but they have been distinct. Understanding these differences is key to importing best practices and, equally important, to understanding the relational action-reaction logic that partly drives cross-Strait tensions.

Under the first Trump administration, a 'primacist' twist to USA-China hegemonic contestation became evident, although the American President's transactional instincts and deep reservations about a hypothetical US intervention in Taiwan played as a potential spoiler until early 2020. Firstly, since Washington's support for Taipei is also driven by the broader logic of hegemonic contestation, a forceful US pushback may heighten the cross-Strait security dilemma¹³⁸. This is especially true when US policy is aimed at an 'overwhelming military, technological, and economic

¹³⁵ Interview with a high-ranking Taiwanese official, Taipei, June 2025.

¹³⁶ Interview with Taiwanese diplomat, 24 February 2023.

¹³⁷ M. Martina, Y. Lee and B. Blanchard, '[Trump aims to exceed first term's weapons sales to Taiwan, officials say](#)', *Reuters*, 30 May 2025.

¹³⁸ G. Pugliese, '[COVID-19 and the Reification of the US-China "Cold War"](#)', *Asia-Pacific Journal*, Vol18, No 15, 2020.

superiority over China. [Because] stability can only be achieved through a power imbalance¹³⁹, or with maximalist goals, such as regime change as a legitimate end-state of the American government's China policy¹⁴⁰. These prescriptions echo the US government policy under the latter part of the first Trump administration, especially during the COVID-19 crisis¹⁴¹, suggesting that China's 'wolf-warrior' diplomacy was also an aggressive reaction that hailed from a mix of hubris and regime insecurity¹⁴². Secondly, some of the analyses and assumptions on cross-Straits tensions should be carefully assessed. For example, the 'fact' that 'Xi has hinted at the "will to unify Taiwan by force even if Taiwan does not declare independence"'¹⁴³ has been questioned by specialists, who posit that China still prioritises 'peaceful unification', while it belligerently does not discount the use of force to *deter* Taiwan's independence¹⁴⁴. China may potentially achieve 'peaceful unification' also through its expanding toolkit of political warfare, but it is not a given. Thirdly, the emphasis on deterrence and on cost imposition alone, along with the dismissal of accidental wars¹⁴⁵, devalues reassurances and is intimately linked with the above two points. These assumptions, along with the newly inaugurated whole-of-government China pushback under Trump 1.0, have further compounded USA-China contestation, including across the Taiwan Strait, courting Chinese aggressiveness across the board¹⁴⁶. In short, these policies contained powerful elements of a self-fulfilling prophecy.

The Biden-Harris administration adjusted the US government's approach towards Taiwan in meaningful ways, while acting in broad continuity. Firstly, it operated a foreign policy typical of the US Wilsonian tradition to emphasise democratic values. Thus, Taiwan acquired renewed importance as a frontline of not merely geopolitical (or geo-economic) USA-China hegemonic contestation, but of a USA-led pushback against revisionist techno-autocracies, particularly so following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Washington opened international space for Taiwan, including an invitation to the Summit for Democracy, and lobbied in bilateral and multilateral settings for language specific

¹³⁹ M. Pottinger, '[Taiwan wa hontō ni ayau!](#)' [Taiwan is truly in danger], *Bungei Shunjū PLUS*, 09 May 2025; The opening paragraph of the US National Security Council's US Strategic Framework for the Indo-Pacific reflects that logic: 'How to maintain U.S. strategic primacy in the Indo-Pacific region and promote a liberal economic order while preventing China from establishing new, illiberal spheres of influence, and cultivating areas of cooperation to promote regional peace and prosperity?'. See, The Trump White House, [U.S. Strategic Framework for the Indo-Pacific](#), declassified in 2021.

¹⁴⁰ M. Pottinger and M. Gallagher, '[No Substitute for Victory: America's Competition With China Must Be Won, Not Managed](#),' *Foreign Affairs*, 10 April 2024.

¹⁴¹ N. Funatsu, '[Handling "value" in the US-China conflict](#)', *Japan Institute of International Affairs*, 13 May 2021.

¹⁴² J. Schectman and C. Bing, '[Exclusive: Trump Launched CIA Covert Influence Operation Against China](#),' *Reuters*, 14 March 2024; G. Pugliese, '[COVID-19 and the Reification of the US-China "Cold War"](#)', *Asia-Pacific Journal*, Vol18, No 15, 2020.

¹⁴³ M. Pottinger, '[Taiwan wa hontō ni ayau!](#)' [Taiwan is truly in danger], *Bungei Shunjū PLUS*, 09 May 2025.

¹⁴⁴ Y. Matsuda, '[Taiwan yūji no "kyojitsu" to "bunmyaku"](#)' [Fact and Fictions' and 'Context' Surrounding a Taiwan Conflict'], *Tōa*, September, 2022, p. 1; R. C. Bush, [8 Key Things to Notice from Xi Jinping's New Year Speech on Taiwan](#), *Brookings Institution*, 04 January 2019.

¹⁴⁵ M. Pottinger and M. Turpin, '[The Myth of Accidental Wars](#)', in M. Pottinger (ed.) *The Boiling Moat: Urgent Steps to Defend Taiwan*, Hoover Institution Press: Stanford, USA, 2024, pp.43-58.

¹⁴⁶ F. Grzegorzewski, '[Strategic Ambiguity in US-Taiwan Relations During the Donald Trump Administration](#)', *Polish Political Science Yearbook*, Vol 51, 2022, pp. 59-74.

to peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait as well as on Taiwan's meaningful participation in international organisations that do not require statehood. Secondly, and in connection with the above, the USA more actively leveraged and coordinated with its democratic allies to add scale and capacity in its competition with China¹⁴⁷. Starting with Japan, Washington promoted increased cooperation across military services, joint warfighting across domains, including joint military and deterrence operations, the facilitation of access, especially the hosting of US military assets (such as missiles ranging Taiwan and the PRC) and ancillary support from regional allies. The primary counterparts have been Japan, the Philippines, Australia and, to a lesser extent, the ROK¹⁴⁸. To bolster 'integrated deterrence' in the first island chain, the USA also enlisted third parties further away, including some in Europe, all while favouring allies' military spending¹⁴⁹, to allow for: exports of military platforms and components to Taiwan; co-production and co-development of weapons; co-management; interoperability; as well as sustainment and sealift capacity. Indeed, Washington encouraged European deployments across the Taiwan Strait, in addition to prodding the revival of American and allies' defence industrial bases to provide logistical support and ammunition in case of a crisis, even if indirectly through triangulation¹⁵⁰. Some of these policies were incubated by the Trump administration, but the Biden-Harris administration's less unilateral approach, its drive to achieve scale at allies-level and a degree of receptiveness to its allies' needs allowed for a 'lattice-work of strong and mutually reinforcing coalitions'¹⁵¹ aimed at 'integrated deterrence'.

Thirdly, the Biden-Harris administration supported Taiwan by more than military means. Military sales decreased by more than 50 % compared to the first Trump administration, although the administration also implemented the 2022 Taiwan Policy and 2023 National Defence Authorisation Acts to allow for military aid¹⁵², and cajoled Taiwan into procuring asymmetric means rather than prestige platforms. Notably, Washington coordinated the provision of international public goods to compete with China in the Indo-Pacific region, a playbook which the USA had already learnt from Japan (under the first Trump administration)¹⁵³. Specific to Taiwan, the USA and its allies' provisions ranged from vaccines to capacity-building aimed at a more holistic view of security, including civil defence and societal resilience, to tools for combatting illegal maritime activities through the Indo-Pacific Maritime Domain Awareness (IPMDA) initiative announced in 2022, which though never took off due to a panoply of maritime domain awareness offers¹⁵⁴. Japan is the USA's partner of choice

¹⁴⁷ K. Campbell and R. Doshi, '[Underestimating China: Why America needs a new strategy of allied scale to offset Beijing's enduring advantages](#)', *Foreign Affairs*, 10 April 2025.

¹⁴⁸ G. Pugliese and M. Zappa, '[Japan 2023: Still Walking in Abe Shinzō's Footsteps](#)', *Asia Maior*, Vol 34, 2024, pp. 65-124.

¹⁴⁹ US Department of Defense, '[Generals Say Integrated Deterrence Is Key to Protecting U.S., Allies, Partners](#)', 03 March 2022.

¹⁵⁰ Interviews with US Department of Defense officials, Washington DC, 06 February 2024

¹⁵¹ The Biden White House, '[Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States](#)', February 2022.

¹⁵² F. Grzegorzewski, '[Rekonstrukcja strategii Stanów Zjednoczonych wobec Tajwanu podczas prezydentury Josepha Bidena](#)' [Reconstructing the United States' strategy toward Taiwan during Joseph Biden's presidency], *Politeja*, Vol 4, No 85, 2023, pp. 117-119.

¹⁵³ A. Inisa and G. Pugliese, '[The Free and Open Indo-Pacific versus the Belt and Road: Spheres of Influence and Sino-Japanese Relations](#)', *The Pacific Review*, Vol 35, No 3, 2020, pp. 557-585.

¹⁵⁴ J. Park, '[Maritime Domain Awareness or Silent War?](#)', *Irregular Warfare Initiative*, 20 May 2025.

in all the above, working in lockstep with the US government and suggesting that it is the second most important player when it comes to G7+ allies' moves on Taiwan. Finally, and in line with the emphasis on public goods, in 2022, the USA and Taiwan inaugurated the *US-Taiwan Initiative on 21st Century Trade*, which includes a Technology Trade and Investment Collaboration supply chain component and reached an early harvest deal, which has already entered into force¹⁵⁵. While the agreement did not remove tariff barriers, it streamlines customs administration, enhances good regulatory practice, and, via deepened cooperation, also facilitates trade in the service industry with an eye on small and medium enterprises¹⁵⁶. The agreement's modular quality implies that a second agreement, currently under negotiation, will, through similar mechanisms, smoothen trade in other sectors, such as labour, environment and agriculture, although this may be unlikely under Trump.

Box 2: How to court chip capacity from Taiwan

Taiwan is central to the chip industry because its foundries dominate advanced semiconductor manufacturing, while Taiwanese firms also lead in downstream chip assembly, testing and packaging. TSMC alone accounts for 90 % of cutting-edge chip production, making up between 5 % and 6 % of Taiwan's GDP in 2024¹⁵⁷. Chip supply chain disruptions during the COVID-19 pandemic, compounded not only by the deterioration in USA-China and cross-Strait relations, but also the growing demand for EVs and electronic goods and droughts caused by extreme weather, have been a wake-up call for businesses and policy-makers alike. Since advanced semiconductors are key to the twin digital (DX) and green (GX) transformations, securing their steady supply has become imperative for advanced economies.

The American and Japanese governments have been pioneers in the field of economic security, ahead of the pandemic, as exemplified by their successful luring of Taiwanese semiconductor foundries. In 2020, TSMC announced a USD 12 billion investment in Arizona to support the USA's manufacturing, which by March 2025 had reached a total of USD 165 billion for the construction of six 'fabs' (fabrication plants), two packaging sites and one R&D centre, the largest FDI for greenfield investments in the USA's history¹⁵⁸. Additionally, TSMC has promised two 'fabs' in Japan and one in Germany, through a joint venture, for less advanced chips. These fabs serve and will serve automotive, consumer and high-performance markets in Japan, as well as stabilising automotive supply in Europe.

The recipe for securing Taiwanese advanced chips production capacity is a byproduct of diplomatic and security support, as well as political alignment. After all, Taiwan's National Development Council, a state agency, has one representative on TSMC's board, while Japan and the USA have been at the forefront of Taiwan's defence. At the same time, economic incentives via G7+ allies' industrial policies, together with a profitable and sound ecosystem, from regulatory and labour laws adaptability to industrial clustering and overall profitability, suggest that the company operates chiefly in line with business considerations.

¹⁵⁵ Office of the US Trade Representative, '[USTR Announces Entry into Force of First Agreement under U.S.-Taiwan Initiative on 21st Century Trade](#)', 09 December 2024.

¹⁵⁶ Office of the US Trade Representative, '[USTR Announces Entry into Force of First Agreement under U.S.-Taiwan Initiative on 21st Century Trade](#)', 09 December 2024.

¹⁵⁷ G. Chen, '[Silicon shield to "global TSMC"](#)', *Taipei Times*, 10 March 2025.

¹⁵⁸ Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company, '[TSMC Arizona](#)', webpage, 09 June 2025.

Rising demand in the USA and new investments in Artificial Intelligence projects, as part of the Stargate Project, have and will certainly contribute to TSMC's continued growth in global market share, while the company retains production of the most advanced chips on the island. A similar process has been applied to Japan and Germany, where visible displays of political proximity, such as Germany's Education Minister's 2023 visit to Taipei, have worked in accordance with market incentives, including industrial policies. The EU, Japan and the USA all have the equivalent of a 'Chips Act'. In any event, Taiwan's outsourcing of production of highly advanced chips abroad is limited by design¹⁵⁹, since TSMC relies on a tight supply chain of local small and medium enterprises as subcontractors to produce highly advanced chips, and since the company as well as the state are unwilling to hollow out a key sector, thus preserving 'strategic indispensability' and market competitiveness.

The Biden-Harris administration added one noteworthy element of distinction from the preceding government, one that is often underappreciated. Under this administration, Washington engaged in relentless strategic competition with China, including tighter and more institutionalised export controls of high-end technology – starting with advanced semiconductors and the capabilities needed to produce them – looking also to stifle modernisation of the People's Liberation Army's military capabilities, especially the PLA Rocket Force's precision strike capabilities with its thousands of ballistic missiles that can target anywhere in Taiwan¹⁶⁰. Yet, it has done so along with reassurances. Key decision-makers in the Biden-Harris administration consistently argued for managing competition with China, accepting Xi's regime as a given, containing it across domains, but trying to avoid escalation¹⁶¹. Indeed, by 2023, USA-China diplomacy allowed for a degree of stabilisation in the relationship. Earlier pledges by the US President about his country's military involvement in a Taiwan contingency, along with those of Japanese serving ministers and former leaders, were meant to affect the cost calculations in Beijing, but arguably detracted from 'strategic ambiguity'. Nonetheless, the Biden administration brought back that ambiguity when it reassured the PRC of its abidance to a 'One China' policy. American officials consistently walked back the president's (well-planned) 'lapsus linguae'¹⁶²; they censored and distanced the US government from a Taiwanese cabinet minister's attempt at portraying Taiwan as a separate political entity during the 2021 Summit for Democracy¹⁶³, and Biden probably blocked Taipei from changing its representative office's name in Washington¹⁶⁴. More subtly, the American government failed to

¹⁵⁹ Interview with Taiwanese government official, 17 June 2026.

¹⁶⁰ Interview with mid-ranking diplomat, 07 September 2023; I. Kanapathy, '[Countering China's Gray-Zone Activities](#)', in M. Pottinger (ed), *The Boiling Moat: Urgent Steps to Defend Taiwan*, Hoover Institution Press: Stanford, USA, 2024, p. 111.

¹⁶¹ R. Doshi and K. Campbell, '[How America can shore up Asian order: A strategy for restoring balance and legitimacy](#)', *Foreign Affairs*, 12 January 2021; K. Campbell, and J. Sullivan, '[Competition without catastrophe: How America can both challenge and coexist with China](#)', *Foreign Affairs*, 01 August 2019.

¹⁶² D.E. Sanger, *New Cold Wars: China's Rise, Russia's Invasion and America's Struggle to Defend the West*, Scribe: London, UK, 2024, pp. 284–285.

¹⁶³ H. Pamuk, M. Martina and D. Brunnstrom, '[The curious case of a map and a disappearing Taiwan minister at U.S. democracy summit](#)', *Reuters*, 13 December 2021.

¹⁶⁴ D. Sevastopulo and K. Hille, '[Washington risks Beijing ire over proposal to rename Taiwan's US office](#)', *Financial Times*, 10 September 2021.

dissuade the US Speaker of the House, Nancy Pelosi, from visiting Taiwan in 2022¹⁶⁵, and avoided sending high-ranking sitting administration officials to visit the ROC, unlike Trump 1.0. These best practices suggest that governments can prioritise substantial support for Taiwan over symbolic displays that may add little of substance or, at worst, jeopardise stability amidst ongoing strategic competition. At the same time, the diplomatic shift 'support[ing] Taiwan's meaningful participation in international organizations' *tout court* was likely taking place during the last year of the Biden presidency (see the first paragraph in this paper's Introduction, including the relevant footnote).

In fact, the security dilemma is in full swing as demonstrated by China's reactive aggressiveness following Pelosi's visit – the Biden-Harris administration's 'competitive coexistence' *bona fide* notwithstanding. Neither government could show weakness back in August 2022 in the face of the American mid-term elections and the CCP National Congress. Since then, China routinised military pressure to a new norm to enforce joint forces' operational preparedness (to both coerce *and* deter Taiwan as well as its allies) and to compel Taiwanese public opinion through so called 'cognitive warfare'; meanwhile, the USA continued its 'integrated deterrence' approach across the first island chain and elicited NATO to factor in contributions over a Taiwan contingency more actively. Then, USA-China engagement channels froze before reopening in mid-2023. At any rate, mistrust kept running high, as China suggested it was behind American infrastructure hacks as punishment for its support of Taiwan¹⁶⁶.

The second Trump administration is tweaking earlier approaches, but 'known unknowns' abound. At the time of writing, 'Asia-First balancers' and MAGA 'restrainers' have gained the upper hand in decision-making processes. The former camp aims to reduce the US global military footprint, from forward deployment to military assistance, while concentrating assets and efforts in most of the Asia-Pacific theatre, with Taiwan at its centre. The aforementioned Colby is mostly representative of this thinking, as is the US Department of Defense's recent, partially backtracked, decision to remove military assets from Ukraine¹⁶⁷. The USA will partially delink the Indo-Pacific from the Euro-Atlantic, with expectations that Europe will focus on its strategic theatre as the USA rebalances elsewhere. Moreover, American 'primacist' policy-makers' preferences, including regime change, have been openly opposed by MAGA discourse. Earlier layoffs within the second Trump administration's National Security Council imply as much¹⁶⁸, as does a recent speech by the American Secretary of Defense¹⁶⁹. As the People's Liberation Army (PLA) military exercises around Taiwan continue unabated, garner tempo and demonstrate operational complexity, recent US

¹⁶⁵ The Taiwanese government too, was reportedly not fully supportive of Pelosi's visit. See Z. Zhou, J. Wang and H. Wu, '裴洛西質疑我撤邀 仍堅持訪台' [Pelosi questioned withdrawal of invitation and still insisted on visiting Taiwan], *China Times*, 02 August 2022.

¹⁶⁶ D. Volz, 'In secret meeting, China acknowledged role in U.S. infrastructure hacks', *The Wall Street Journal*, 10 April 2025.

¹⁶⁷ N. Bertrand and Z. Cohen, 'Hegseth did not inform the White House before he authorized pause on weapon shipments to Ukraine, sources say', *CNN*, 08 July 2025.

¹⁶⁸ The Economist, 'China hawks are losing influence in Trumpworld, despite the trade war', 15 April 2025.

¹⁶⁹ T. Wong, 'Hegseth warns China poses 'imminent' threat to Taiwan and urges Asia to boost defence', *BBC News*, 31 May 2025.

Department of Defense and expert discourse is doubling down on impending Taiwan war scenarios, a byproduct – according to these opinionmakers – of Xi's desire to seize Taiwan and/or of the USA's policy of restraint¹⁷⁰. This discourse is reminiscent of that around 2020-22 on a closing timeline towards a Taiwan crisis¹⁷¹. Yet, this may also reflect the tug of war between the US national security establishment *vis-à-vis* the MAGA camp, with implications for budget appropriation and overall Taiwan policy, not unlike earlier dynamics ahead of the passage, in 2022, of the 2023 National Defense Authorization Act. Indeed, PLA drills around Taiwan are a far cry from those following Pelosi's visit and often have a strong performative dimension for China's home audience – as suggested by former Japanese Ambassador to China Tarumi Hideo¹⁷². Moreover, they run parallel to the nimble A2/AD drills performed by the USA and its allies¹⁷³, suggesting an emphasis on deterrence and preparedness by both sides. The current EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy's inquiring 'if the US was worried that its rhetoric – particularly over Taiwan – had the potential to spark a miscalculation in Beijing,¹⁷⁴' suggested an appreciation of the action-reaction cycles across the Strait.

At the time of writing, 'Asia-First balancers' seem to have the upper hand, and the US administration policies suggest a stronger bent on economic and socio-cultural decoupling *vis-à-vis* China, thus exacerbating the security dilemma, including across the Strait. While 'known unknowns' remain regarding a Trump-Xi grand bargain, a key variable given the US president's transactional instincts and personal doubts about the sustainability of a US response to a Taiwan contingency, or an American military involvement in the Middle East, the second Trump administration has, so far, been walking away from the 'One China' policy, borrowing from Japan's approach, and has publicly called for Taiwan's entry into international organisations *tout court*, while removing references to any lack of support of Taiwan's independence (see Box 1 above). Moreover, the USA's retrenchment elsewhere under Trump 2.0¹⁷⁵ – potentially including South

¹⁷⁰ According to this discourse, these exercises are rehearsals of an attack on Taiwan, including by blockade or quarantine. S. J. Paparo, [Statement of Admiral Samuel J. Paparo, Commander, U.S. Indo-Pacific Command: U.S. Indo-Pacific Command Posture](#), House Armed Services Committee, April 2025; B. Lin, J. Culver and B. Hart, [The Risk of War in the Taiwan Strait Is High—and Getting Higher](#), *Foreign Affairs*, 15 May 2025; O.S. Mastro and B. Yoder, [The Taiwan Tightrope: Deterrence Is a Balancing Act, and America Is Starting to Slip](#), *Foreign Affairs*, 20 May 2025; E. Ratner, [The Case for a Pacific Defense Pact: America Needs a New Asian Alliance to Counter China](#), *Foreign Affairs*, 27 May 2025.

¹⁷¹ As recounted above, these claims were eventually stifled by government-enforced message discipline, in the interest of USA-China stability, especially so ahead of the 2024 Presidential and Legislative Yuan elections in Taiwan. See N. Robertson, [How DC became obsessed with a potential 2027 Chinese invasion of Taiwan](#), *Defense News*, 07 May 2024.

¹⁷² H. Tarumi, [Shūkinpei no "kokka no anzen" ni keikai seyo](#) [Beware of Xi Jinping's 'national security'], *Bungei Shunjū*, 08 August 2024.

¹⁷³ T.-y. Yang and K. T. Tang, [Strait Thunder-2025A Drill Implies Future Increase in PLA Pressure on Taiwan](#), *Jamestown Foundation*, 11 April 2025; The Economist, [America's new ship-killer missiles come to the Philippines](#), 22 May 2025.

¹⁷⁴ D. Sevastopulo, K. Hille and O. Walker, [Hegseth warns Chinese military action against Taiwan "could be imminent"](#), *Financial Times*, 31 May 2025.

¹⁷⁵ Washington Post, [Secret Pentagon memo on China, homeland has Heritage fingerprints](#), 29 March 2025.

Korea¹⁷⁶— is aimed at buttressing the first and, to a lesser extent, second island chains, with an emphasis on Taiwan's defence¹⁷⁷.

Given the influence of 'restrainers', American decision-makers will, though, expect East Asia regional allies not only to demonstrate the capability *and* willingness to fight, but also to contribute actively to US efforts. This includes incrementing defence spending and embracing the military, including civil defence, for whole-of-society responses. The implications for Taiwan and its *de facto* regional allies, including Japan, are many because their societies still prize welfare over warfare and lack an ingrained security consciousness¹⁷⁸, although this is slowly changing in Taiwan¹⁷⁹. At any rate, militarily speaking, the USA is acting in broad continuity with earlier 'integrated deterrence' moves through the deployment of standoff capabilities, through allies allowing access to American forces and assets, and by buttressing Taiwan's defences with more arms sales. Still, scepticism on China's readiness, hence its willingness to coerce Taiwan militarily, persists considering the PRC's current economic headwinds, its exposure to exports as an engine of growth and hence the PRC regime's survival – an interest that is even more pressing to the CCP than re-unification – as well as disarray within the military chain of command¹⁸⁰.

As G7+ members increase their diplomatic presence and security contribution in Taiwan, with the USA aiding Taiwan's asymmetric defence strategy across the first island chain, there is preliminary evidence that suggests a division of labour. Indeed, following (and sometimes feeding into) the US lead, Japan and most of the Five Eyes (which includes: USA, UK, Australia, New Zealand and Canada) allies are at the forefront of efforts to confront China, sometimes by sending signals via the dispatch of military assets across the Taiwan Strait and especially by reinforcing Taipei's resilience in the kinetic, grey zone, and civil defence realms. Aside from access, rear area, logistics, sustainment and potentially kinetic support for the USA, Japan is strengthening, training and undertaking joint exercises with Taiwan's Coast Guard – also in light of Japan's long-standing experience with the Chinese Coast Guards' white hulls and paramilitary vessels around the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands – while the UK is helping with other grey zone scenarios, including strategic communications¹⁸¹.

¹⁷⁶ C. Davies, ['The "Quiet" Crisis Brewing Between the US and South Korea,'](#) *Financial Times*, 26 May 2025.

¹⁷⁷ M. Martina, Y. Lee and B. Blanchard, ['Trump aims to exceed first term's weapons sales to Taiwan, officials say'](#), *Reuters*, 30 May 2025.

¹⁷⁸ R. Ward, ['Evaluating Japan's New Grand Strategy,'](#) Routledge: Londn, UK, 2025, p.101-116.

¹⁷⁹ K-C Lee, ['Taiwanese Support for National Defense: Insights from Public Opinion Survey'](#), *Defense Security Brief*, Vol 13, No 1, 2024, pp. 01-08.

¹⁸⁰ P. Saunders and J. Wuthnow, ['Xi Can't Trust His Own Military'](#), *New York Times*, 06 May 2025.

¹⁸¹ T. Chau, ['US, UK, Japan diplomatic contingents in Taiwan are bigger than ever'](#), *Nikkei Asia*, 08 May 2025.

Box 3: Support of Taiwan through parliamentary diplomacy and the Global Cooperation and Training Framework

Parliamentary diplomacy has been Taiwan's instrument of choice to allay international isolation. Through active engagement of legislators in North America, Japan, Western Europe and Southeast Asia, in particular, Taiwan has circumvented the inter-governmental red lines embedded in the 'One China' policy to achieve security as well as political and economic objectives. Engagement of foreign lawmakers allows for building relations with potential future government leaders and may leverage their legislative and oversight prerogatives *vis-à-vis* the executive, as exemplified by the USA's 1979 Taiwan Relations Act. Recent American legislation clarifies, encourages and authorises policies favourable to Taiwan, also through budget allocation aimed at high-level visits, arms transfers, as well as measures aimed at 'increasing [Taiwan's] economic, security, and diplomatic engagement' with countries willing to strengthen or elevate their relations. This further demonstrates the potential for parliamentary engagement¹⁸². Since *circa* 2020-1 and with implicit US support, national legislatures across G7+ allies have been stepping up their game through a heightened numbers of visits – for instance, Japan's record-setting 120 Diet Members visited the island in 2023, whereas less than 10 visited the PRC¹⁸³ – and proactive policy framing, as demonstrated by the European Parliament¹⁸⁴. An emphasis on permissive, rather than mandatory frameworks, as well as concomitant attention to parliamentary diplomacy with China, may help defuse cross-Straits tensions.

Along similar lines, the Global Cooperation and Training Framework (GCTF) opens international space for Taiwan through functional cooperation, capacity-building and exchange of best practices, especially with societal and political leaders from countries that do not recognise Taiwan. This was originally launched in cooperation with the American Institute in Taipei during the Obama-Biden administration in 2015, with the aim of providing an alternative platform for Taiwanese public and private actors to engage with their American counterparts in various fields related to public management. However, by late 2017, the GCTF agenda began to assume a marked political character. It often complements the DPP-led governments' New Southbound Policy initiative to bolster ties with Indo-Pacific players. The platform offers training programmes, leveraging Taiwan's expertise in areas such as public health, cybersecurity, disaster relief and combating disinformation. The GCTF embeds a public diplomacy dimension that showcases Taiwan's technical expertise on key issues, aiming for functional representation in intergovernmental organisations, such as observer status in the International Civil Aviation Organization, Interpol and the WHO. For instance, leveraging Taiwan's excellent track record during the COVID-19 pandemic, a GCTF workshop took place in Geneva, coinciding with the 2023 World Health Assembly gathering¹⁸⁵, in which neither Taiwanese representatives nor journalists could participate. Established in June 2015 by Taiwan and the USA, it has now registered the addition of Japan (2019), followed by Australia (2021) and Canada (2024) as full members and diplomatic backers. The EU may follow suit, perhaps by endorsing the less political and security-oriented elements of the GCTF, such as Taiwan's contribution to transnational challenges and to sustainable development goals.

¹⁸² Z. Šabič and D. Huang, *Parliamentary Diplomacy of Taiwan in Comparative Perspective: Against Isolation and Under-Representation*, Bristol University Press: Bristol, UK, 2021, pp. 56-79.

¹⁸³ T. Lin, 'Japanese MPs prefer Taiwan over China visit: report', *Taipei Times*, 04 March 2024.

¹⁸⁴ N. Casarini, *Brussels-Taipei: Changing the game?*, *Istituto Affari Internazionali*, 06 October 2022.

¹⁸⁵ Global Cooperation and Training Framework, 'Taiwan, U.S., Japan, and Australia hold GCTF workshop during 76th WHA in Geneva to strengthen medical and health cooperation', 01 June 2023.

This section has provided a bird's-eye view of major developments in support of Taiwan, including those that add nuance to the public debate on the drivers of cross-Strait tensions. The EU will need to carve out for itself a space that is ancillary to, or supports, that of its Member States, of G7+ and NATO allies. Moreover, it has opened windows on a range of best and bad practices when it comes to engagement towards Taiwan, spanning from legislative diplomacy, to the construction of new economic and political links, all the way to functional cooperation through the GCTF framework, along with reassurances (or, in some instances, lack thereof) on the 'One China' policy. The second Trump administration's moves in Ukraine and Europe, not to mention Taiwan, will necessarily impact much of the unity of purpose between the two strategic theatres, although there is still the possibility for the EU's principled diplomatic engagement, realistic deterrence and support for Taiwan, as detailed below.

5 Options for enhanced cooperation with Taiwan: Comprehensive diplomacy, deterrence and reassurances

This section takes stock of the above developments to argue that the EU can play a role in aiding Taiwan's prosperity and resilience via a trade and/or investment agreement as well as by contributing to widening Taiwan's international space and enhancing security cooperation. While the European Commission has provided strong language in support of cross-Strait stability and deterrence of potential adversaries, this section will explore the viability of the EU and its Member States sustained diplomatic and security engagement in the Indo-Pacific – and Taiwan in particular, for the purpose of this paper – in light of new geopolitical and economic dynamics that seemingly push towards a more active focus closer to home, especially since the advent of Trump's second administration.

5.1 Comprehensive diplomacy

Interviews with Taiwanese officials, analysts, as well as with EU officials, highlight that Taiwan welcomes EU support in strategic communications, especially in the struggle against Chinese lawfare targeting the island¹⁸⁶. Beijing insist on misrepresenting the 1971 UN Resolution 2758, which granted the PRC a seat as the representative of China in the world's premier international organisation, as a UN-mandated endorsement of its 'One China' principle¹⁸⁷. This runs alongside a diplomatic offensive aimed at augmenting the number of states which switch recognition from the ROC to the PRC. In fact, the EU and the overwhelming majority of its Member States abide by a range of 'One China' policies that do not openly challenge Beijing's position, albeit at the same time

¹⁸⁶ Interview with senior Taiwanese official, Taipei, June 2025; Interview with Senior Researchers in a major Taiwanese think tank, Taipei, June 2025; Interview with Senior EU diplomat, undisclosed location, June 2025.

¹⁸⁷ J. Drun and B. Glaser, '[The Distortion of UN Resolution 2758 and Limits on Taiwan's Access to the United Nations](#)', German Marshall Fund, 24 March 2022.

leaving plenty of room for maintaining unofficial contacts with Taipei¹⁸⁸, a long-standing position among G7+ allies. This sub-section will provide details on how the EU and its Member States can push back diplomatically on China's cross-Strait 'lawfare'¹⁸⁹ and explore Taiwan's participation in appropriate multilateral organisations where statehood is not required.

From an international law perspective, Taiwan is a 'declarative state', not unlike Kosovo and Palestine, by virtue of having a government; having both a people and a territory ruled by this government; and being capable of engaging in international relations (as shown, for instance, by participation in the WTO). But the credibility of Taiwanese statehood should preferably be matched by international recognition. In other words, the ROC should also be identifiable as a 'constitutive state'¹⁹⁰. The EU, its Member States, and like-minded partners can leave residual recognition intact by supporting Taiwan's international relationships, including with the pre-existent 12 states that recognise Taipei, and through better coordination with the USA and other G7+ allies. A creative solution to China's poaching of Taiwan's diplomatic allies could then be an informal, collective arrangement that provides Official Development Assistance, investments and international public goods as a form of 'sticky power' that informs the cost-benefit analysis of these and other countries' relationship with Taipei. Such an informal agreement can follow through the USA's 2019 Taiwan Allies International Protection and Enhancement Initiative Act and can be thought out through a similar, non-binding legislative motion.

Furthermore, the EU can more vocally support Taiwan's participation in multilateral bodies where it is currently excluded, even in roles such as observer. Building upon the experience of the COVID-19 pandemic, the EU can push the envelope to once again provide Taiwan observer status in the WHA without voting rights, as was the case between 2009 and 2016 – an important precedent that highlights the arbitrary nature of Beijing's bans against Taiwan. The EU is only an observer to the WHA. Yet, it does possess an important role in coordinating the common position of its Member States at the WHA and in supporting global health initiatives, including pandemic preparedness. It also maintains a strategic partnership with the WHO at both technical and political levels. Above all, it is a direct financial contributor to the WHO. For these reasons, as a last resort option to support Taiwan on this issue, the EU may consider requiring Taiwan's return as an observer as a precondition for continuing funding. Taipei's return as an observer to the WHA, in turn, could be used by EU Member States to also spearhead its return as an observer to the International Civil Aviation Organisation, another important multilateral body in which Taiwan previously participated as an observer before the post-2016 collapse of cross-Strait relations. Building upon these efforts, the push to provide observer status may also be expanded to other multilateral bodies such as the International Maritime Organization (given that Taiwan has one of the world's largest merchant fleets) and the World Meteorological Organization. The advantage

¹⁸⁸ G. Tercovich and L. Comerma, '[Europe's Eyes on Taiwan: Strategic Ties, Different Perspectives](#)', *Center for Security Diplomacy and Strategy*, No 16, 2025.

¹⁸⁹ M. J. West and A. Insisa, '[Reunifying Taiwan with China through Cross-Strait Lawfare](#)', *The China Quarterly*, Vol 257, 2024, pp. 186–201.

¹⁹⁰ P. Dutton, '[Talking points: What does international law say about Taiwan?](#)', New York University School of Law, US-Asia Law Institute, 17 October 2022.

would be reciprocal. These organisations, which serve critical regulatory and coordinating functions internationally, would benefit from Taiwan's presence and contributions, as its successful experience in containing the COVID-19 pandemic shows. At the same time, Taiwan's presence would enhance international perceptions of its legitimacy as an actor in global governance.

In a context of gradual, fraught but nonetheless ongoing cooling between the EU and the Chinese economies, the EU could reassess not just the feasibility of a bilateral investment agreement with Taiwan, but also explore the possibility of a Free Trade Agreement (FTA). While the EU's own 'One China' policy already provides latitude for such an agreement, savvy strategic communications may shape the information domain and counter predictable criticism both within Europe and especially from China by referring to the 2013 free trade agreement between New Zealand and Taiwan. The final decision is ultimately political, and resting in the hands of the European Commission and the Member States, rather than in the European Parliament, yet it is important to notice that the downward trajectory of Sino-European relations, and more importantly Europe's increasingly serious attempts to map and address overdependencies from China, opens new avenues beyond the short-term for a transformative FTA with Taiwan. Given the intense backlash and political obstacles to be expected in the attempt to sign an FTA, another potential and less disruptive avenue to support Taiwan would be for the EU to apply to the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), following the example of European polities such as the UK (already a member) and Ukraine (which submitted a formal request to join the trade bloc in 2023). Like China, Taiwan has also applied to the CPTPP. EU membership in this trade agreement, especially in a context where both Beijing and Taipei would also be members, would benefit EU-Taiwan relations while potentially softening the geo-economic impact of Beijing's response.

Given the wide array of diplomatic tools available to the EU, the search for new avenues to support Taiwan should not stop at sustaining participation in international organisations and multilateral bodies and bolstering economic diplomacy. It should also focus on a transformative approach to academic diplomacy, which would start from the implementation of systemic reforms *within* the EU academic landscape. In particular, since the EU needs to make sense of a complex reality, it needs to develop, if not strategic autonomy, sustained and diffuse capacity in fostering the understanding of the Indo-Pacific and cross-Strait relations more specifically. Area Studies training is under duress in Europe, as elsewhere. Multidisciplinary training in one region's language, history and politics is succumbing to the lure of concepts-heavy social sciences disciplines, or science, technology, engineering, and mathematics subjects. This is a byproduct of diminished government funding following the end of the Cold War, changed job market demands, and the advent of Artificial Intelligence-assisted machine learning and translation. As a result, European institutions with a strong East Asia Area Studies tradition are withering, due to decreasing student demand and broader public budget cuts¹⁹¹. Since stability in the Indo-Pacific region, starting with Taiwan, is key

¹⁹¹ E. Dixon, '[Humanities cuts "harbinger" of bleak future for Dutch sector](#)', *Times Higher Education*, 31 October 2024; Heidelberg University, '[Higher education financial planning: State universities fear tough cuts](#)', 11 November 2024; J. Rowsell, '[Thousands back call to save Sheffield East Asian studies degrees](#)', *Times Higher Education*, 16 January 2025.

to EU interests, the ideas industry, from think-tanks to academic institutions, cannot be left solely dependent on short-term, project-based external funding, often hailing from the very actors with active stakes in the region.

There is a knowledge asymmetry compared to East Asia and even the USA, where the development of Area Studies expertise in academia and think-tanks is more advanced, diffuse and organic to state power, compared to Europe. Indeed, the cultivation and leverage of said expertise by extra-EU state actors is systematic, rather than by happenstance, although it may often breed 'embedded' thinkers. The EU and its Member States could create, nurture and pool specialised knowledge. EU strategic autonomy can be enhanced through financing and promoting under-funded Area Studies expertise, especially in their strategic and military declination: Taiwan, Japan, the USA's posture in Asia, the two Koreas, and even Chinese strategic studies, as well as security decision-making dynamics and regional interactions tend to be understudied in Europe. These countries are all key players that impact EU-Taiwan relations, and a wider European knowledge pool will deepen understanding of cross-Strait relations. Southeast Asia, too, is largely understudied and poorly understood in Europe.

Against this backdrop, the European Commission's Readiness 2030/ReArm Europe initiative could spell out an explicit allocation of resources to foster this capacity, aimed at blue-sky independent policy-relevant academic research and the formation of future European leaders in understanding a key region for global peace and prosperity¹⁹². Such expertise could be subsequently tapped through network-building along the lines of recent Horizon projects aimed at an EU-wide China knowledge capacity¹⁹³, or through institutionalised consulting with the European Commission¹⁹⁴. This holistic 'Task Force' approach avoids silo-thinking typical of one-country expertise, to appreciate the embedded relationality and complexity of cross-Strait relations and the international relations of East Asia. Matter of fact, academic and research diplomacy could sustain the pursuit of EU security interests and of Taiwan's security writ large through the inclusion of Taiwan as a fully associated member to Horizon Europe itself, the EU's flagship research and innovation funding programme. The participation of another 'declarative state', such as Kosovo, as a fully associated member, and of the Republic of Korea as the first Asian associated country in Horizon Europe, can amply justify the decision. Beyond fostering Area Studies expertise, Taiwan's inclusion in Horizon Europe would allow an institutionalisation of research cooperation on semiconductors under the second and third pillars of the funding programme: 'Global Challenges and European Industrial Competitiveness' and 'Innovative Europe', with an eye on the development

¹⁹² The allocation of resources should work through an international blue-ribbon control group, or any similar institutional mechanism, that enforces selection based on merit; to avoid the pitfalls of both political utilitarianism and academic inbreeding, the latter being particularly pronounced in Europe.

¹⁹³ European Commission, '[HORIZON-WIDERA-2023-ERA-01-06: Building a virtual European Info Platform on Contemporary China. Funding & Tenders Portal](#)', webpage, 06 December 2022.

¹⁹⁴ European Commission, '[Call for Expression of Interest: Fellowship Programme on China](#)', IDEA/AD/2023/FELLOW, 25 January 2023.

of new technologies for the advanced packaging of chips with military or dual use capabilities¹⁹⁵. To conclude, the EU should invest in the expansion of a pre-existing platform such as the GCTF, which, given its flexibility in scope and organisation, could be easily retooled as a strategic incubator to plan and examine the feasibility and implementation of these diplomatic initiatives.

5.2 Realistic deterrence

It was suggested earlier that the USA and its allies, starting with Japan, have spearhead deterrence efforts aimed at Taiwan's defence. What does this mean in terms of EU-Taiwan relations? It is true that much of the remit on hard military cooperation involves NATO and NATO/EU Member States, rather than the EU *per se*. In fact, the USA's enlisting of European allies on Taiwan worked primarily at the bilateral and NATO levels¹⁹⁶. Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine hastened political and security alignment on Taiwan, including the stance in the EU. As a result of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, European views on China have soured, American leverage has grown and reciprocity between European and Indo-Pacific 'like-minded partners' has blossomed, as regional players such as Japan, the ROK and Australia have supported Ukraine financially, diplomatically and militarily¹⁹⁷.

In fact, the ability to unite the two theatres was in no small part initially facilitated by the Biden administration, as evidenced by the partnerships between NATO and Indo-Pacific 4 (IP4) countries – Japan, the Republic of Korea, Australia and New Zealand. By late 2022, for instance, NATO also began factoring in possible crisis scenarios involving Taiwan with the purpose of 'strongly discouraging China from taking any actions that will change the status quo'¹⁹⁸. 'Tabletop exercises' have examined potential NATO member states' contributions in the event of a crisis concerning Taiwan, and limited involvement emerged as the preferred outcome¹⁹⁹. Options for enhanced cooperation include sanctions, logistical support, the use of regional UK or French military bases, and filling the vacuum left after the redeployment of more American troops and assets to East Asia, with the first being the only enforceable EU policy item. Moreover, support can go beyond narrowly defined military cooperation to allow for technological and defence industrial partnerships, including responses across new domains, such as space and cyber, which transcend geographic boundaries.

The EU's 'geopolitical Commission' has announced an ambitious role as a security provider to Taiwan. Notably, the *Political Guidelines for the Next European Commission* elaborated by Commission President, Ursula von der Leyen, take stock of the need for 'integrated deterrence' by

¹⁹⁵ A. Insisa, '[Italy's De-Risking Efforts in the Semiconductor Industry, the European Chips Act and Sino-American Geo-Economic Competition](#)', *Istituto Affari Internazionali*, Vol 25, No 5, 2025, pp. 11-15.

¹⁹⁶ L. Odgaard (ed), '[Moving the NATO-IP4 Partnership from Dialogue to Cooperation: Maritime Security and Next-Generation Technologies](#)', *Hudson Institute*, 2025.

¹⁹⁷ Starting with NATO Headquarters all the way to the Berlaymont building. G. Pugliese, '[The European Union and an 'Indo-Pacific' Alignment](#)', *Asia-Pacific Review*, Vol 31, No 4, 2024, pp. 17-44.

¹⁹⁸ Nikkei Asia, '[NATO aims to 'discourage' China on Taiwan, official says](#)', 13 November 2023.

¹⁹⁹ Interview with a US defence practitioner, Track 1.5 dialogue, 07 November 2023.

'strengthening our strategic approach to sanctions'²⁰⁰ and, in concert with Indo-Pacific players, by 'deploy[ing] the full range of our combined statecraft to deter China from unilaterally changing the *status quo* by military means, particularly over Taiwan'²⁰¹. At the same time, there is no end to Russia's war in Ukraine, quite the contrary, as Russia's war economy will hold EU attention and resources on its eastern flank. Moreover, while EU support for continued sanctions has been steadfast since 2022, should the USA progressively abandon Ukraine, intra-EU solidarity will be under greater strain as it faces a war economy in the east. Effectively, Ukraine is a proxy war for Russia's President, Vladimir Putin, aimed at driving a wedge within NATO and within the EU, in the face of an increasingly disaffected and possibly impoverished electorate.

Under the new Trump-Vance administration, the EU faces headwinds on three fronts, which are feeding a reconsideration of its strategic horizons: (i) Trump's tariff offensive; (ii) US requests for higher defence spending; and (iii) a lighter forward deployment footprint in Europe coupled with a potential grand bargain with Russia over Ukraine. Moreover, US blanket tariffs, together with its global diplomatic and economic disengagement, will create even more political instability originating from the so-called Global South as well as Europe's neighbourhood. This could result from general cuts, the downsizing of US diplomacy or the advancement of MAGA personnel within US institutions. As a result, since resources are finite, and the European appetite for risk will lower, the EU's hard security footprint in East Asia will remain limited. Accordingly, it is necessary to be realistic about the scope of the EU and its Member States' deterrence contributions to Taiwan, as will be covered next.

At the time of writing, Washington's likely prioritisation of strategic competition with China and Taiwan's defence opens space for a meaningful European role in the kinetic realm, specifically defence industrial cooperation and sustainment. The USA-led force posture changes across the first island chain suggest that Japan and Australia, in particular, are expected to deploy assets in a Taiwan contingency. Defence industrial cooperation projects aim at strengthening American regional allies' capabilities, especially as military budgets in mature economies need to factor in high public spending on welfare and often debt servicing amidst low economic growth. A clear example of this logic is the AUKUS deal, the trilateral security partnership between Australia, the UK and the USA. Albeit under review at the time of writing, this aims to develop Emerging Disruptive Technologies with military applications and enlist Australian submarines (procured and, eventually, licensed from the US) in a hypothetical war with China.

Another example is the Global Combat Air Programme, allowing Japan to develop a sixth-generation fighter jet with the UK and Italy by 2035, with an eye on East Asia's severe strategic theatre. The Global Combat Air Programme has been favoured by pre-existing defence industrial links and by the embeddedness of these three nations' military industrial complexes in/with USA counterparts, subsidiaries and clients, especially in the aviation industry, part of the reason why it

²⁰⁰ U. von der Leyen, '[Europe's Choice: Political Guidelines for the Next European Commission 2024-2029](#)', 18 July 2024, p. 15.

²⁰¹ U. von der Leyen, '[Europe's Choice: Political Guidelines for the Next European Commission 2024-2029](#)', 18 July 2024, p. 28.

was blessed by the Biden-Harris administration. With Trump's return to the White House, the EU too will support defence industrial cooperation projects between Member States, as well as Indo-Pacific security and defence partners²⁰².

These collaborative projects, of course, have implications for Taiwan in terms of fostering new capabilities, but there is also potential for collaboration in sustainment – the ability to replace or repair defence assets during military operations. For instance, the USA has designated Italy and Japan as the only two Final Assembly and Check Out facilities for the assembly and production of F-35 aircraft outside of the USA, and these facilities may also double down on servicing and repair work. Along with Japan (and Australia)'s ability to provide access, rear area support and potentially defence of and joint warfighting with the USA, this can be seen as an additional force multiplier that involves an EU Member State and may be of great value in the event of a Taiwan crisis.

There is evidence of continued American interest in the co-development of new defence technology, increasing capacity at scale, while strengthening logistics support and sustainability. Notably, the USA has urged and ensured that Japan would be the first Asian member of the Multinational Industrial Security Working Group with an eye on industrial security, aimed at R&D testing and evaluation, to favour both USA-Japan and NATO-IP4 cooperation²⁰³. Along these lines, the USA-Japan Defence Industrial Cooperation, Acquisition and Sustainment forum identifies areas for integration of Japanese defence industry equipment into the USA's defence industrial base. Hence, Japanese (and Australian) shipyards and companies will carry out repair work on American warships and aircraft should they become damaged. As mentioned above, similar arrangements may also appeal to EU players. For instance, many of the FREMM/Constellation-class frigates deployed by the US Navy are built by Fincantieri, an Italian state-controlled company. EU Member States' interest in the rich, growing regional procurement market may thus also contribute to America's grand strategy by venturing into co-production, co-development and sustainment initiatives, as suggested by a recent USA-Italy summit joint statement between Trump and Giorgia Meloni²⁰⁴. Under the Trump-Vance administration, US Department of Defense budgets have increased, and new bills such as the 'Ships for America Act' and earlier initiatives aimed at strengthening the USA's defence industrial base will move forward in a similar direction. For instance, the Partnership for Indo-Pacific Industrial Resilience is aimed at sustainment, counting Taiwan as a member along with unspecified European and Indo-Pacific players²⁰⁵. This may thus allow collaboration between industrial and tech actors across the two theatres to add and repair capabilities in a kinetic scenario involving Taiwan.

There is a distinctive EU angle to this logic. Firstly, and specifically, the White Paper for European Defence-Readiness2030 allows for European resources to be pooled. Specifically, it allows for

²⁰² T. Tsuji, '[Japan and EU plan major upgrade to defense-sector cooperation](#)', *Nikkei Asia*, 16 June 2025.

A. Pal and K. Needam '[Australia to begin talks on security, defence with EU](#)', *Reuters*, 18 June 2025.

²⁰³ N. Baldauff, '[Why Japan's defence technology cooperation with Europe deserves attention](#)', European University Institute, Policy Brief, 2024.

²⁰⁴ The White House, '[United States– Italy joint leaders' statement](#)', 18 April 2025.

²⁰⁵ US Department of Defense, '[Fact sheet: Partnership for Indo-Pacific Industrial Resilience \(PIPIR\)](#)', 01 June 2025.

fiscal flexibility by allowing Member States' defence spending to be accommodated under Maastricht Treaty budget rules, it inaugurates common EU bonds aimed also at joint projects through the Security Action for Europe (SAFE) loan instrument, and it mobilises private investment through public-private partnerships. This may simply allow the bolstering of the EU's defence industrial base, with ammunition, platforms and components that may replenish depleted stocks in the event of a Taiwan kinetic scenario. Moreover, since Japan and the Republic of Korea have a Security and Defence Partnership with the EU, there is an explicit possibility for EU funding, as spelt out in the SAFE loan instrument. This would allow local East Asian defence industry players to participate in collaborative procurements with EU Member States on the same footing as EU industry²⁰⁶. Capacity can be added by leveraging pre-existing and complementary technology strengths, where EU Member States, as well as local Asian security and defence partners, excel. In short, through new EU-wide defence investment schemes, EU Member States can aim at co-production with Indo-Pacific players that are likely to be involved in a Taiwan crisis scenario and may also be in a position to repair American and allies' military assets.

Secondly, China's military and grey zone activities are testing vulnerabilities in Taiwan's defensive capabilities, aiming to sow uncertainty and discord among the Taiwanese population, exacerbating pre-existing socio-political tensions and making sure that cross-Strait relations remain a wedge issue among local constituencies. Moreover, these activities are slowly changing the *status quo* and could eventually deprive Taiwan of the ability to defend itself while routinising intimidating activities in areas where Taipei, before the late 2010s, had not been challenged for decades. PLA aircraft incursions in Taiwan's Air Defence Identification Zone and crossing of the Taiwan Strait median line are seemingly cases in point, although not necessarily so (see below). The EU and/or its Member States could support Taiwan in this grey zone realm, with an eye on potential kinetic developments, albeit indirectly via capacity-building aimed at resilience and civil defence, such as preparations for the evacuation of civilians, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, including man-made disasters. Alternative forms of security cooperation may be considered more accessible, *inter alia*: geo-economic issues; cyber and information domain technology; countering 'cognitive warfare' and FIMI; as well as general intelligence sharing.

Specifically, EU Member States can help by exposing, through timely strategic communications, Chinese coercive behaviour that does not match its own pledges of 'peaceful unification', as well as the principles of 'peace and stability across the Strait'. These include forays within prohibited and restricted waters (equivalent to the territorial and contiguous zones) of the ROC's outlying islands, notably Kinmen and Matsu. Additional informational and diplomatic backing from the EU, coupled with stern warnings to Beijing, should thus be aimed at deterrence through surveillance and exposure²⁰⁷. Furthermore, EU strategic communications activities designed to raise awareness and condemn China's brazenly coercive tactics may also contribute to taming Beijing's behaviour,

²⁰⁶ European Commission, [Proposal for a Council Regulation establishing the Security Action for Europe \(SAFE\) through the reinforcement of European defence industry instrument](#), (COM(2025) 122 final), 19 March 2025, para 21.

²⁰⁷ I. Kanapathy, '[Countering China's Gray-Zone Activities](#)', in M. Pottinger (ed.), *The Boiling Moat: Urgent Steps to Defend Taiwan*, Hoover Institution Press: Stanford, USA, 2024, p. 105-127.

as well as heightening the plight of Taiwan among European public opinion, thus enhancing EU-Taiwan relations bilaterally. At the same time, competent EU strategic communications must effectively and proactively shape the information environment by publicising only those incidents that it understands as brazenly coercive, with the objective of avoiding demonising China and the creation of a *public* challenge to Beijing²⁰⁸, which would worsen EU-China and cross-Strait relations.

Regarding other grey zone and pre-crisis scenarios, collaboration may also foster the EU's resilience thanks to Taiwan's history of coordinated efforts, now including government and non-government actors, to grapple with these challenges. EU-Taiwan capacity building on grey zone contingencies, cognitive warfare and civilian defence will buttress the Taiwanese government's 'Whole-of-Society Defence Resilience' initiative to strengthen civilian training against natural (and man-made) disasters; 'Crimea-like' hybrid warfare scenarios; security contingencies; and FIMI. This builds on pre-existing initiatives and follows through on the aforementioned 2024 European Parliament Resolution 2024/2891 regarding EU-China relations/Taiwan²⁰⁹. Moreover, exchanges of best practices can and should work both ways to buttress the EU's resilience and knowledge of China's *modus operandi* and, conversely, Taiwan's appreciation of the EU's handling of Russia's 'grey zone' activities. Two immediate measures can be identified in this context. First, given the EU's close cooperation with the Helsinki-based European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats (from here on Hybrid CoE), the EU can also explore ways to facilitate the embedding of Taiwanese experts in the institute while also fostering exchanges with Taiwanese institutions such as the Graduate Institute of International Affairs and Strategic Studies of Tamkang University. Second, the EEAS through the European Economic and Trade Office in Taipei may engage with Taiwan's vast whole-of-society ecosystem focusing on disinformation, including both institutions such as the Cognitive Warfare Research Center of the Investigative Bureau of the ROC Ministry of Justice, and civil society organisations such as DoubleThink Lab, to formally adopt the EEAS' own FIMI framework and methodology for threats in the information domain²¹⁰ to streamline cooperative research.

China is actively using commercial and civilian capabilities to bolster its amphibious capacity. This is designed for both intelligence-gathering²¹¹ and logistical purposes, such as the Guangzhou Shipyard International's temporary pier that can be linked to other vessels via barges to create one long causeway, possibly aimed at a Taiwan invasion²¹². More recently, China is leveraging an expanding fleet of 'shadow vessels' to engage more consistently in grey zone operations aimed at cutting underwater sea cables, thus severing internet connectivity. Dark vessels include older,

²⁰⁸ R. C. Bush, ['To Respect the One-China Policy, Here's What the Trump Administration Should and Shouldn't Do'](#), *Brookings Institution*, 3 April 2017.

²⁰⁹ European Parliament, [Resolution on the misinterpretation of UN resolution 2758 by the People's Republic of China and its continuous military provocations around Taiwan \(2024/2891\(RSP\)\)](#), P10_TA(2024)0030, 23 October 2024, para. 9.

²¹⁰ EEAS, [3rd EEAS Report on Foreign Manipulation and Interference Threats: Exposing the Architecture of FIMI Operations](#), 2025.

²¹¹ *Focus Taiwan*, ['Taiwan expels Chinese ship suspected of military-intent seabed survey near Dongding Island'](#), 13 March 2025

²¹² A. Luck, ['Stairway to Taiwan – The Chinese Amphibious Bridging System'](#), *Naval News*, 25 March 2025.

poorly maintained ships that avoid detection by concealing their identities through misleading signals and ship registration practices. Given that the number of dark vessels has ballooned in the past two years and as cable-cutting incidents have risen, the EU and its Member States can favour Taiwan's Maritime Domain Awareness, and hence its security, by providing greater intelligence sharing at the Member States and potentially at the EU level, even just via third parties such as the United States. This objective can also be achieved with the amelioration of competing Maritime Domain Awareness initiatives within the G7, notably the USA-led IPMDA initiative involving the USA, India, Japan and Australia (see section 4), and the EU's Indo-Pacific Regional Information Sharing platform, which is part of the CRIMARIO II Project. The EU can also lobby for Taiwanese authorities' participation in multilateral groupings for port state control, such as the regional Tokyo Memorandum system. The EU and its Member States could also more stringently regulate dark fleets – against local vested interests of importing cheap Russian oil and gas resources – and respond more proactively to similar incidents in its own specific theatre, so as to exchange best practices with Taiwan on potential avenues for law enforcement, potentially building upon, leveraging and expanding the EU's Addressing Hybrid Threats in the Indo-Pacific – Pilot Action (HIPPA) inaugurated in 2023 between the EU and Australia²¹³.

Through the aforementioned EU financing schemes, EU Member States can also export dual-use components and platforms, such as drones and sensors used for domain awareness or attack purposes, with implications for both kinetic and grey zone scenarios. A clear example is the recent deal between Taiwan and the USA, along with German-based Auterion, for attack drone software that, at a minimal cost and by being battle-tested in Ukraine, can detect and destroy adversaries' expensive military platforms²¹⁴. This is in line with the USA-initiated asymmetric defence strategy for Taiwan's defence. Concrete measures for guaranteeing the supply and maintenance of communication resilience could include endowing Taiwan with Franco-British Eutelsat satellites in lieu of Elon Musk's Starlink, perhaps in cooperation with Japanese space technology, or securing, protecting and invigilating underwater sea cables via the innovative Italian Sparkle-Fincantieri entente and potential best practices via Italy's newly inaugurated National Underwater Dimension Hub. Noticeably, these measures may provide an opportunity to reorient the EU's Global Gateway connectivity projects towards Taiwan, stimulating public-private partnerships via a 'Team Europe' approach that would, in turn, bolster Taiwanese resilience and favour EU Member States' businesses in the process, in a fashion coherent with the concept of realistic deterrence.

Finally, since Taiwan's economy is highly export-reliant and crucial to global semiconductor supply chains, studies should map out the implications that any invasion attempt, or conversely, a blockade or quarantine of Taiwan, will have on the EU and the global economy, including China. Authoritative voices suggest that while Taiwan's 'silicon shield' will not deter a Chinese invasion, it may prevent a *prolonged* blockade or quarantine aimed at subjugating the island, because the first economy to suffer from the inability to import intermediary products from Taiwan, including mid-range chips,

²¹³ European Commission, [Addressing Hybrid Threats in the Indo-Pacific – Pilot Action \(HIPPA\)](#), 13 October 2023.

²¹⁴ A. Wang, ['Taiwan seals Ukraine combat-tested drone software deal to help deter China'](#), *Reuters*, 17 June 2025.

would be China²¹⁵. The international political and economic backlash against China during a blockade or quarantine, along with the ability of Taiwan's allies to foster the resilience needed to withstand such coercive scenarios, should further compound these effects, thereby detrimentally altering Beijing's cost calculations.

5.3 Democratic support and reassurances

This final sub-section deals with a caveat concerning the coherence of the initiatives covered above, with support for Taiwan's democracy. Considering major polarisation within Taiwan's unicameral parliament (the Legislative Yuan), the EU and its Member States should avoid being perceived as partisan actors supporting specifically the party currently in control of the executive branch, the DPP. This would certainly not help the EU's standing within Taiwan when, and if, the government changes. It is noteworthy that the legislature led by the KMT and Taiwan's People Party approved expenditure cuts totalling a record TWD 207.5 billion (EUR 5.7 billion), including sizeable freezes of defence-related funds, including half of the budget devoted to Taiwan's fleet of own submarines. These budgetary manoeuvres, partially backtracked following a prolonged tug-of-war, have occurred in the context of contested attempts to curtail the power of the executive branch and shift the balance of power between institutions to the legislative branch. While acknowledging that an external actor such as the EU cannot and should not affect the domestic and cross-Strait political calculations of these parties, other options must be considered to anchor them to a continuing engagement with the EU and its institutions.

A clear example of the above logic is the EU's potential contributions to the fight against cognitive warfare, grey zone scenarios, as well as FIMI in Taiwan. The EU can help in crisis and risk strategic communications in the context of cross-Strait tensions, and preliminary evidence suggests that these efforts are ongoing. They can further be bolstered through triangulation as the former EU representative in Taipei is in charge of Information Integrity (and countering FIMI), while the current representative was formerly in charge of the EEAS Strategic Communications Task Force. However, the EU should keep in mind the distinction and potential linkage between the two concepts, lest risks evolve into crisis or extreme events. Moreover, it ought to be remembered that 'extreme events are simultaneously material crises and interpretive struggles, requiring communication strategies that bridge institutional expertise with public perceptions'²¹⁶.

For instance, in 2020, the Tsai administration effectively managed the COVID-19 pandemic and associated infodemic – thanks to previous experience with earlier contagious events originating from China and health management of what was effectively a common, invisible enemy. In comparison, the Tsai administration's domestic strategic communications efforts downplayed the risk of cross-Strait tensions throughout her mandate, arguably also out of fear of a public

²¹⁵ I. Kanapathy, '[Countering China's Gray-Zone Activities](#)', in M. Pottinger (ed.) *The Boiling Moot: Urgent Steps to Defend Taiwan*, Hoover Institution Press: Stanford, USA, 2024, p. 105–127.

²¹⁶ O. Ware, 'Critically assess the strategic communications challenges of extreme events' (work submitted as final essay for a King's College London MA module on Strategic Communications: Theories and Concepts, with a specific case study on Britain's handling of the pandemic), April 2025, pp. 18–19.

backlash²¹⁷. Her successor's 'Whole-of-Society Defence Resilience' initiative marks an evolution because it suggests greater institutional readiness aimed at social resilience. The Taiwanese government's embrace of risk communication and the delineation of a more concrete crisis hails from China's sabre-rattling, as well as the need to legitimise increased defence budgets and enforce security reforms, such as the 2024 extension of mandatory conscription to one year. But it is worth noting that, aside from socio-economic grievances, the KMT is able to present itself to portions of the Taiwanese electorate as more capable of, and careful in, navigating cross-Strait tensions versus Lai's DPP.

The EU and its Member States may prepare for crisis communication behind closed doors but should be aware of the above-mentioned complex dynamics within Taiwan and of cross-Strait relations, including EU allies' information operations. This is especially true considering the contested nature of East Asian international relations, the highly politicised nature of cross-Strait relations and the porous nature of Taiwan's domestic politics. After all, much of China's activities are below the threshold of aggression, and sometimes react to initiatives originating elsewhere, in turn exposing the contested interpretations of the same within Taiwan. EU Strategic communications efforts in Taiwan should thus focus on risk mitigation, also through the aforementioned deterrence by disclosure *but* specific to Chinese activities that qualify as coercive and high-threat. For instance, forays in the Taiwan-declared Air Defence Identification Zone should not necessarily be considered as such²¹⁸, nor should the recent exercises by two Chinese aircraft carriers in the second island chain. Indeed, the former are often mislabelled as Chinese intrusions in 'Taiwan's airspace', while the latter has been painted as an indication of 'Chinese expansionist nature'²¹⁹. This process of demonisation, typical of information operations²²⁰, should be avoided because it automatically links a risk to a crisis, favouring self-fulfilling prophecies and not necessarily supporting Taiwan's democracy.

Similarly, a risk mitigation approach may prepare the ground for Taiwanese resilience. For instance, a hypothetical EU support to a GCTF Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief project will allow for leveraging lessons learnt in preparation for natural disasters and for 'man-made' disasters, such as a blockade, an embargo or an invasion. This allows for an open-ended contribution that does not exacerbate cross-Strait action-reaction dynamics, provides diplomatic cover to engaged EU Member States, *and* assuages intra-Taiwan politicised dynamics associated with more-markedly securitised (and politicised) civil and territorial defence preparations. Given the composite

²¹⁷ Interview with Taiwanese Ministry of National Defence Consultant, 23 February 2023.

²¹⁸ I. Kanapathy, '[Countering China's Gray-Zone Activities](#)', in M. Pottinger (ed.), *The Boiling Moat: Urgent Steps to Defend Taiwan*, Hoover Institution Press: Stanford, USA, 2024, p. 111-116.

²¹⁹ M. Yamaguchi and D. Rising, '[Why 2 Chinese aircraft carriers are operating in the Pacific together for the first time](#)', *Boston Herald*, 12 June 2025. Common interpretations of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea allow for military exercises in EEZ and it is often forgotten that China's rivals sometimes perform drills in or near China's Exclusive Economic Zone. See S. Menegazzi, '[Military Exercises in the Exclusive Economic Zones: The Chinese Perspective](#)', *Maritime Safety and Security Law Journal*, Vol 1, 2015, pp. 56-70.

²²⁰ I. Kanapathy, '[Countering China's Gray-Zone Activities](#)', in M. Pottinger (ed.), *The Boiling Moat: Urgent Steps to Defend Taiwan*, Hoover Institution Press: Stanford, USA, 2024, p. 111-112.

interpretation within Taiwan of what constitutes a threat – to the extent that the unionist newspaper *China Times* echoes narratives of mainland newspapers in putting blame on President Lai²²¹, and that recent polls from the pan-blue leaning TVBS find 35 % of respondents cast Lai as a ‘troublemaker’²²² – this approach would preserve Taiwan’s internal democracy, while also insulating EU-Taiwan relations from fraught domestic politics.

Furthermore, an initial emphasis on EU contributions for risk mitigation is modular, in that it allows for flexibility in the renegotiation of individual threat perceptions should risks translate into a real crisis. Given the highly partisan nature of Taiwanese politics, ‘whole-of-society’ approaches to resilience thus necessarily need to work for all interested parties and leverage state institutions, because trust should be earned by the Taiwanese population. The aim should thus be to establish trust, and the EU may work as a bridge in this regard.

East Asia’s most vibrant liberal democracy, Taiwan, is wholly representative of the socio-economic, political and media fragmentation witnessed elsewhere in the world, with the added complexity of vested cross-Strait economic interests influencing major domestic players’ stance, including the editorial stance of Taiwanese media outlets. Nevertheless, polls suggest that while trust towards politicians is split, trust towards public institutions and public servants is still high, with the police and soldiers receiving the highest endorsements. In the above context, the EU’s potential strategic communications efforts in Taiwan – ranging from countering and exposing plausibly deniable ‘hybrid threat’ tactics to FIMI – need to be nuanced, neutral, sensitive and open to dialogue with public perceptions, emphasising dialogue with local stakeholders²²³.

Finally, broader security and diplomatic engagement of Taiwan can and ought to take place under the umbrella of the EU’s ‘One China’ policy. Such policies ought not to be static, fixed tools exclusively subject to Beijing’s instrumental interpretations. Rather, there is scope to provide democratic support to Taiwan while abiding by different, publicised ‘One China’ policies. Confusion over quite what a ‘One China’ policy commits the EU to blurs debate and proper thinking within EU Member States about what the options actually are. This comes down to three options. The first option recognises Taiwan as part of China, framing the debate exclusively on how and when it is ‘reunified’. This position implies not only recognition of Beijing as the only legitimate government of China but also of Beijing’s right to decide what ‘China’ consists of. The second option recognises the Beijing government as the only legitimate government of China, but leaves space for outsiders

²²¹ L. Lams, ‘Framing Practices in the Taiwanese / Chinese media Presidential Elections in Taiwan – January 2024’, Presentation at the European University Institute, 13 March 2025. The majority of print media in Taiwan is lenient towards the mainland, especially after the closure of the Hong Kong-based Apple Daily, hence of most of its Taiwanese subsidiary’s activities, limited to an online presence. See *Nihon Keizai Shinbun*, ‘[Akaku Somaru Shinbun Media – Taiwan](#)’ [Taiwanese media soaked in red], 19 January 2022.

²²² TVBS Poll Center, ‘[Minzhong dui Lai zongtong guo'an 17 xiang celüe kanfa min diao](#)’ [Opinion poll on public perceptions of President Lai's 17 national security measures], 18 March 2025, p. 03.

²²³ J. Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action: Volume 1: Reason and the Rationalization of Society*, Beacon Press: Boston, MA, 1985; B. Rogers and J. Pearce ‘[The Psychology of Crisis Communication](#)’ in A. Schwarz, M. W. Seeger and C. Auer (eds.), *The Handbook of International Crisis Communication Research*, John Wiley & Sons, Inc: Hoboken, USA, pp. 34-44.

to take no position on which territories can or should form part of China, including Taiwan. Finally, the third option entails formal recognition of a 'One China'/'One Taiwan' twin policy, whether by accepting Taiwan in international organisations *tout court*, including those that require statehood or by removing language not in support of Taiwan's independence. The first option is broadly synonymous with the 'One China' principle; the second one covers the ground of most 'One China' policies, with strategic ambiguity aimed at maintaining a clear stance against unilateral declarations of independence (from Taiwan) or unilateral use of coercion from the PRC. Yet, in the face of Chinese coercion, hence changes of the military and grey zone status quo across the Strait, mounting evidence suggests that some G7 allies, especially Japan and the USA, are verging towards the third option, signalling, or dangling the threat of, formal *de jure* recognition of Taiwan as a state.

The EU and its Member States need to approach reassurances towards China with the above distinction in mind. Reassurances *must not* become an acceptance of China's narrative that the correct interpretation, and the one that everyone committed themselves to (even if they never did), is the one embedded in the 'One China' principle. A handful of EU Member States, such as Hungary, have aligned with this stance but this is a minority stance. A 'One China' policy is the best path, and much can be done to bolster Taiwan's democracy and resilience within its very broad tent, including bolstering Taiwan's 'constitutive state' qualities by having the EU support Taiwan's international relations, including the dozen states that formally recognise Taiwan. This can be done without contradicting formal recognition of the PRC. A 'One China'/'One Taiwan' policy may, on the contrary, be useful in a full crisis scenario to come to the defence of Taiwan. Effectively, it will allow Taiwan's allies to leverage international law principles that will more easily apply to diplomatically recognised 'constitutive states'. But aside from the economic and political fallout of relations with China, opting for a 'One China'/'One Taiwan' policy *now* is dangerous, because it may well hasten the evolution of a cross-Strait risk into a crisis.

In short, the EU would be well advised to walk the tightrope of 'One China' policy ambiguity by providing support to Taiwan, whilst avoiding high-profile, public displays that may ultimately be detrimental to Taiwan's plight. The EU Economic and Trade Office can provide substantive, political and security support to Taiwan without formally upgrading its name. Some of the best practices explored above, for instance, the Biden-Harris administration's ability to provide substantive support to Taiwan while maintaining a track record of 'One China' policy strategic ambiguity, throughout most of the administration at least, suggest as much.

6 Conclusion and forward-looking recommendations

The European Parliament can steer the EU towards taking concrete measures to support Taiwan via budget appropriation and the issuing of new recommendations. These concrete measures include:

- 1) Improving strategic communications to counter Chinese lawfare over UN Resolution 2758, to clarify the latitude and scope of its 'One China' policy *vis-à-vis* Beijing, and to further raise awareness of Chinese grey zone operations targeting Taiwan, while being cognizant of the

unhelpful and destabilising implications of pursuing a 'One China' / 'One Taiwan' policy, which the EU does not endorse. The EU should, in fact, advocate for language that suggests continuity and abidance to a 'One China' policy, by all of its G7+ diplomatic allies.

- 2) Exploring creative solutions to sustain Taiwan's international relations, including its 12 remaining 'diplomatic allies', through investment and provision of international public goods to make sure that Taipei enjoys rights as both a 'declarative' and 'constitutive' state. Exploring the possibility of withholding funding to multilateral bodies such as the WHO, in exchange for Taiwan's return to these organisations with observer status. Furthermore, explore, against the backdrop of cooling relations with China, the feasibility of concluding a free trade agreement, instead of a bilateral investment agreement, with Taiwan. Alternatively, gaining admission within the CPTPP, together with Taiwan, to improve trade relations.
- 3) Liberating the EU ideas industry from the constraints of short-term, project-based external funding often funded by extra-European actors, sometimes with vested interests, and injecting new long-term funding schemes aiming at revitalising Area Studies expertise of East Asia, including Japan, Taiwan, China, the two Koreas, and the USA, and especially in their strategic declination. Making use of Readiness 2030 / ReArm Europe to spell out explicit allocation of resources to foster blue-sky, independent policy-relevant academic research and the formation of future European leaders is a key region for global peace and prosperity. Making also use of Horizon Europe, via Taiwan's inclusion as a fully associated member, to deepen technological cooperation with concrete positive spillover effects, in R&D, economic security and broader people-to-people exchanges.
- 4) Leverage new EU funding schemes and flexible budget rules to engage in defence industrial cooperation with like-minded partners in the Pacific region, starting with countries with which the EU has a Security and Defence Partnership agreement, such as Japan, the Republic of Korea and, in the near future, potentially Australia. Such new funding schemes and financial streams may also be aimed at adding capacity for the sake of logistic support, and regional sustainment, that is, the ability to replace or repair defence assets during military operations, thus aiding US grand strategy and helping Taiwan.
- 5) Establishing new rules and sanction regimes aimed at curbing dark fleet vessels more stringently in response to cable-cutting 'incidents' across the Strait (and in the Baltic Sea) with the aim of increasing the costs of hostile actors' probes targeting the EU, Taiwan and G7+ allies. Exchanging best practices with Taiwan on potential avenues for law enforcement, leveraging, for instance, new synergies with the already existing EU's HIPPA initiative.
- 6) Launching EU financing schemes and strategic investments initiatives such as the Global Gateway to facilitate the export of dual-use components and platforms capable to improve Taiwan's resilience to kinetic and grey zone challenges – with an eye on tools for communication resilience such as satellites and underwater sea cables protection, enlisting European companies such as Eutelsat, Sparkle and Fincantieri to reach these objectives. Along the same line, incentivise defence industrial cooperation between EU Member States and 'like-minded' partners in the first line of defence of Taiwan, including the USA but also

those regional players with whom the EU enjoys a Security and Defence Partnership agreement.

- 7) Sustaining intelligence sharing at Member States and potentially at EU levels to favour Taiwan's Maritime Domain Awareness, by harmonising existing initiatives within the G7, such as the IPMDA, with the EU's own Indo-Pacific Regional Information Sharing platform, which is part of the CRIMARIO II Project.
- 8) Improving the exchange of best practices and knowledge in countering hybrid threats by facilitating the embedding of Taiwanese experts in the European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats in Helsinki, while also fostering exchanges with similar Taiwanese institutions. Fostering the adoption of the EEAS-developed FIMI framework and methodology to contrast threats in the information domain by multiple actors operating in the Taiwanese whole-of-society ecosystem focused on disinformation, in order to streamline cooperative research. Exploring the provision of cybersecurity and civil defence resilience via capacity-building programmes.
- 9) Focus on risk management rather than contingency preparations alone, in light of action-reaction cycles that ensnare cross-Straits relations, including the new geopolitics of the first island chain and US-China and Japan-China security dynamics. The above-listed concrete proposals for realistic deterrence and full support for Taiwan's democracy should factor in: the distinction between risk and crisis management; the fraught nature of Taiwanese politics; and, in connection with the above, the contested (and politicised) interpretations of the origins of cross-Straits tensions. In short, along with cost imposition and support for Taiwan, reassurances, prudence, and diplomatic finesse can help prevent the escalation of cross-Straits tensions and avoid the danger of a self-fulfilling prophecy.

To conclude, and in connection with the above, Taiwan's strategic importance to EU security requires increased investment. The European Parliament holds significant budgetary authority, particularly its power to amend Commission budget proposals, making it a crucial actor in advancing this priority. The European Parliament can advocate for increased resources to the EEAS-staffed European Economic and Trade Office in Taipei, aiming to expand the personnel and capacities of both the Political, Press and Information Section (to support Taiwan's struggle against FIMI) and the Trade Section (to streamline consultations within the framework of the EU-Taiwan Trade and Investment Dialogue). European military/defence officers – either still in office or, to avoid upsetting Beijing, recently retired – could also be posted in Taiwan as informal military *attachés*, including in Member States' representative offices, to improve the coordinating of the provision of military hardware, capacity-building and intelligence exchanges. EU Member States could weigh the risks of such moves, or consider if it is realistic, by taking stock of the policy practice of other like-minded partners.

A stronger EEAS presence on the island may also prove instrumental in coordinating institutionalised participation as a full partner (alongside the USA, Japan, Australia and Canada) in the GCTF, Taiwan's flagship initiative to engage with like-minded partners on a wide range of political, social, technological, economic and security issues.

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