

## Revisiting Europe's „One China Policy”

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Europe's policy regarding Taiwan and cross-straits relations needs overhauling. For decades, Europe focused on balancing the right of self-determination and peaceful resolution of Beijing-Taipei differences with the PRC's "One-China principle" and "One country, two systems" rhetoric. Recent actions by the PRC have rendered this European policy inadequate. It must now be revisited.

Europe's policy up to now can be summed up in four words: safeguard the status quo. It warned Beijing against coercion and never encouraged any move by Taipei towards independence. It refrained from discussing a free trade treaty, and it did not push hard for the participation of Taiwan in multilateral organisations such as the WHO. Otherwise, Europe treated Taiwan as a separate entity on practical matters ranging from visas to commercial and economic ties.

This status quo has now been undermined and delegitimized by Beijing. On two fronts, the PRC has destroyed the credibility of its Taiwan policy. One concerns reunification following the model of "One country, two systems", said to be applied to Hong Kong. China's recent actions over Hong Kong violate the terms of the international treaty it signed in 1984. While the people of Hong Kong clearly do not want to be governed by the CCP, Beijing's answer is based on coercion, control and subjugation. This demonstrates in the most obvious terms to Taiwan citizens and to the world that "reunification" with any kind of meaningful autonomy or power sharing arrangement is not currently a genuine offer. The rejection of the "One country, two systems" model by the citizens of Taiwan has been so strong that it facilitated a landslide victory for Tsai Ing-wen in Taiwan's January 2020 elections.

The other front is that of peaceful means of reunification and consultation between Beijing and Taipei – always emphasized by European leaders -, and China's willingness to coerce in order to get what it wants. Today, the People's Republic's leaders and mouthpieces are clearly moving away from peaceful means. The Chinese Communist Party claims to represent the Chinese state, to set the territorial extent of China by itself and to determine who is Chinese. These claims are often of dubious legitimacy. They disregard international law and the rights of the people concerned. Since 2013, the CCP has signaled its determination to accelerate the resolution of the Taiwan issue which "cannot be passed on from generation to generation". Xi Jinping has made a sweeping and threatening statement with regard to re-unification in his 2019 New Year speech, a threat repeated in the PLA's 2019 White Book. The omission of the term "peaceful reunification" in Li Keqiang's May 2020 speech at China's National People's Congress was not accidental, either. There is very little negotiating space left for Taiwan, especially as China applies active diplomatic pressure in all international circumstances. It succeeded at the World Health Organization, which cynically ignores the important contributions Taiwan offers for public health. Taiwan is now faced with a wall.

To underline its threats, the size, frequency and intrusiveness of PLA military manoeuvres around Taiwan have escalated since August 2019. Moreover, Taiwan is not the only context in which the PRC has escalated its practices of military intimidation: there is the

Sino-Indian border, the South China Sea, and the East China Sea. In all those cases, the PRC has resorted to the use of force for purposes other than self-defense and has subordinated even core principles of the UN Charter to its own national preferences. None of China's neighbors can ignore these facts. Nor should Europe. Whoever disagrees with China's definition of what is China, who is Chinese, and what level of respect the world owes China's authoritarian ambition stands exposed to retaliation by China's policies, starting with economic pressure, including against European nations. Relying on the past moderation in practice of China's leaders is now an illusion.

The gap in political systems between China and Taiwan has never been as large as it is today: Taiwan has evolved into an open and pluralistic polity in which respect for the dignity of the individual is well-founded and pervasive. Taiwan is among the world's very best performers in fighting the Covid-19 pandemic. It ranks 43rd in the 2020 World Press Freedom Index (and 2nd in Asia), whereas China ranks 177<sup>th</sup>.

To continue Europe's One-China policy as before risks delivering Taiwan's citizens into the CCP's hands, abandoning our obligation to jointly defend the liberal values of democratic societies, and allowing Peking to alter fundamentally the international balance. It is high time to face the CCP's claims to international legitimacy for its expansionist policies. Europe cannot avoid adapting its One China policy today as if nothing had happened. Instead, Beijing needs to be made aware that the respect of international rules and values is not a subject of negotiation for Europe.

Europe must provide more support for Taiwan's embattled democracy. This should include:

- opening dialogue with all relevant political actors in Taiwan, including the holders of the highest offices;
- supporting Taiwan's membership or at least observer status not only in the WHO, but also in other international organizations;
- cooperating internationally with partners from Taiwan, for example on public health in countries of the global South;
- initiating a dialogue on peace, security and stability with Taiwan;
- re-arranging critical supply chains to reduce China-related vulnerabilities;
- upgrading trade and economic relations with Taiwan;
- encouraging the establishment of a Taiwan-based Mandarin language satellite channel in Europe to move away from the PRC's monopoly on Chinese language information.

Europe's strategy must not be revisionist. We advocate keeping the status quo. Our logic should be dialectic: as the PRC fundamentally endangers the status quo through its new Taiwan policy, European nations must change their Taiwan policy, too, to help safeguard stability. To this end, Europe must insist that cross-strait relations respect the right to Taiwan's existence and refrain from any threat or use of force. Europe should make clear to China that if it moves towards the use of force, it would run grave risks: it would risk an economic and political rupture with Europe's democracies, as we would not submit to a *diktat* by the People's Republic.

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