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# EU's Taiwan Stance: A Shift Towards Stronger China Ties?

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Navigating a complex maze, the European Union balances adherence to the 'One China policy'—recognizing only one sovereign state known as China—while championing Taiwanese democracy through unofficial relations. Unlike the United States, which employs 'strategic ambiguity' to function in such terrain, Europe grapples with an enduring dilemma, an unresolved equation shaping its trade and diplomatic strategies.

Clarity surfaced during the January 13, 2024, Taiwan election, spotlighting the Union's shift toward a more explicit inclination to align with the People's Republic of China stance. Fundamentally, the EU's current standpoint indicates deference to China's narrative, likely reflecting a commitment to reengagement, strengthening diplomatic ties, and definitively resolving long-standing bilateral issues.

Reactions to the Democratic Progressive Party's (DPP) resounding 40% victory in a transparent, undisputed election underscored a limited endorsement for the quest of deeper Taiwanese autonomy. President-elect Lai Ching-te extended a conciliatory message to Beijing, yet global responses varied considerably, with the reactions in Europe being notably and unexpectedly surprising.

### "All the Voters & Those Elected": Unraveling EU's Psychosis

In a decisive opening move, the EU's top diplomat Borrell was [explicit](#) last October 2023, leaving no room for ambiguity as he emphasized a pivotal security concern in Sino-European relations—Taiwan. He underlined the following principles: "no recognition of Taiwan as an independent state; no to intimidation, coercion and provocation by any side; no to the use of force; yes to bilateral ties with Taiwan, which do not imply any kind of political recognition as an independent country."

In [response](#), the Taiwan Ministry of Foreign Affairs "solemnly reiterated that Taiwan has long been an independent state and does not need to declare independence." China officially endorsed Borrell's approach, vehemently [characterizing](#) any official political interaction with Taiwan as an "offense against China's sovereignty" and interference in internal affairs.

Exhibiting an abundance of caution, or perhaps influenced by apprehension, the entire EU conveyed its sentiments on the Taiwan election through an unusually brief [85-word statement](#). Remarkably, this declaration, seemingly not tethered to any identifiable authorship, extended greetings solely to the constituents, deliberately excluding any reference to the candidates: the EU congratulated "all the voters who participated in this democratic exercise."

Three days later at the World Economic Forum (Davos), where Taiwan elections were the talk of the town, a conspicuous omission was made by President von der Leyen, the advocate for a supposed

geopolitical Commission. In an [address](#) spanning over 2,800 words, she masterfully sidestepped uttering the word “Taiwan” with calculated finesse.

EU member states, specifically those actively engaged in the topic, abstained from categorizing the election as ‘national’, aligning with China’s preferences. Significantly, they also omitted mentioning Lai by name. Despite extensive efforts by Chinese embassies worldwide to counter statements, Europe offered them little ground to cover.

[Germany](#) and [France](#) extended very similar congratulations to “all voters, the candidates who participated, and those elected.” With a touch of diplomatic escapism, [Italy](#), a former Belt and Road Initiative member, opted to commend the heroes of the “Costa Concordia” shipwreck. Following this lead, [Spain](#) extended felicitations, merely to Guatemala and the French [foreign minister](#). For these significant EU players, Taiwan resides in a realm of non-existence within their diplomatic discourse.

Furthermore, courtesy of the Irish Prime Minister, Ireland said: “We recognize Taiwan is a part of China.” [Xinhua](#) made sure to stress Varadkar’s optimistic wish that “China will achieve peaceful reunification at an early date.” Following this, China announced the resumption of Irish beef imports, timed after a suspension in November 2023.

In contrast, the U.S., Japan, and the United Kingdom adopted a more direct approach, congratulating Lai and the DPP. Noteworthy was the emphasis on President [Biden](#)’s statement—where he had earlier suggested defending the self-governed island if attacked—asserting, “We do not support independence,” seemingly crafted to provide reassurance to Beijing. Despite this, Zhongnanshai [responded](#) by urging America to “exercise extreme prudence” and cautioned against sending signals that might be perceived as supporting “Taiwan independence separatist forces.”

## Calling a Spade a Spade

A plausible interpretation of this novel European approach is that the EU has strategically aligned the bilateral interaction with Taiwan within the broader framework of Sino-European relations, serving three primary objectives: maintaining a geopolitical balance, avoiding direct confrontation with China, and potentially contributing to regional stability.

However, the EU’s strategic shift diverges from prioritizing common values with Taiwan and bolstering ties with democratic allies, a notable deviation in diplomatic engagement. Additionally, the EU overlooks Taiwan’s alignment on the Russo-Ukrainian war, where it consistently supports Ukrainians, [joining in on sanctions](#) on Russia. While the EU rightfully urges China to maintain independence from Putin, Taiwan, aligned with the European posture, may consequently perceive a lack of substantial support from the EU and member states, alienating and disenfranchising the Taiwanese people.

Ironically, two days before the Taiwan election, Wang Yi [emphasized](#) “high-quality strategic coordination” with Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov, stating that both nations “played mainstay roles in global strategic stability.” To ostensibly ensure this stability, last October Putin [promised](#) Xi to “fight for five years” in Ukraine. Xi [responded](#) appreciating their “deep friendship.” China’s puzzling stance on the Russo-Ukrainian War—the main challenge for Europe, adds incongruity to Europe’s reactions to the Taiwan election.

Therefore, when evaluating the strategies of other international actors, a question arises: Can Europe not develop a distinct Taiwan policy, separate from its China policy, in line with other major

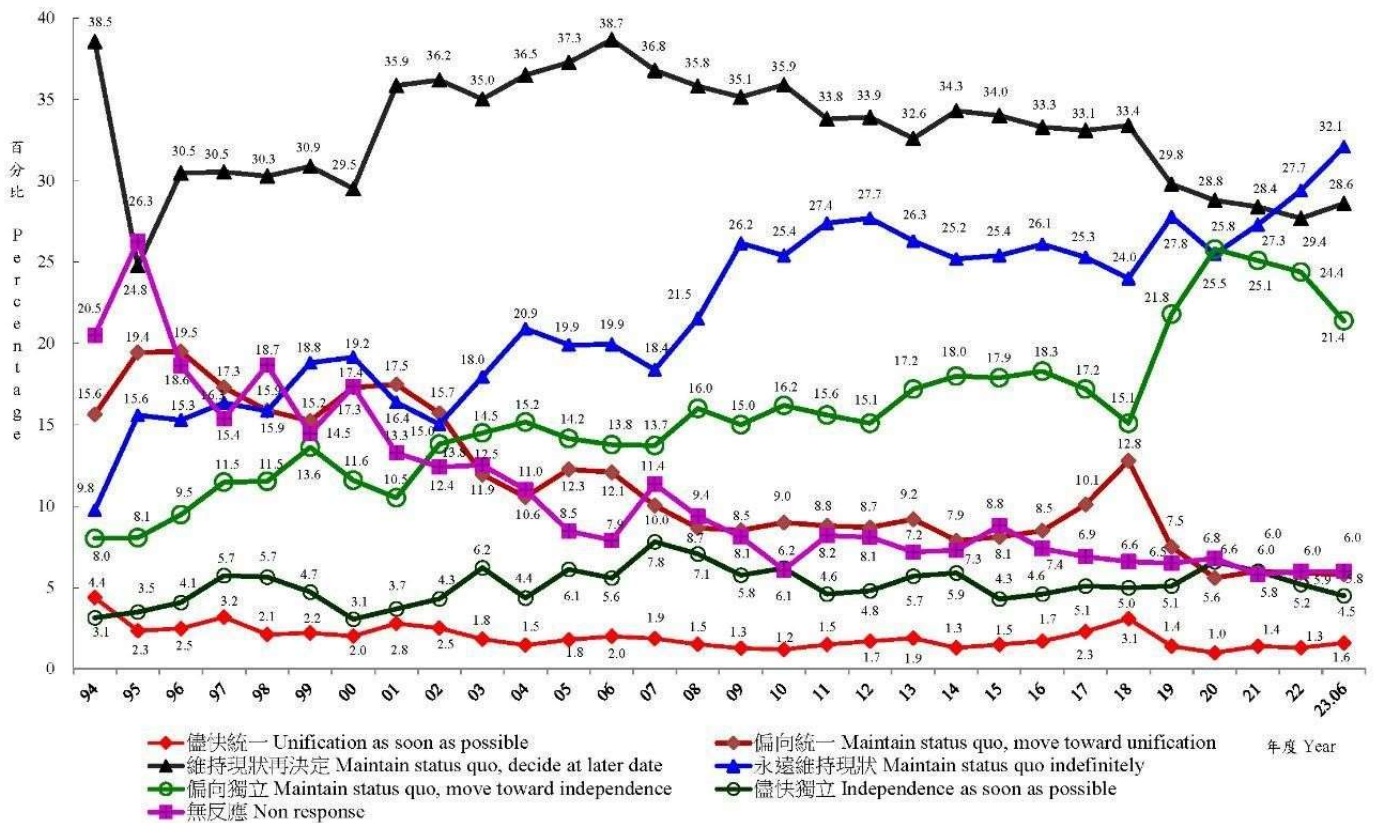
powers? Why doesn't the EU assert its values and principles in such opportunity? The importance of discerning between demonstrating due respect and displaying subservience becomes crucial, as assuming the other party's wishes may not be advantageous. Such gratuitous actions convey vulnerability rather than diplomatic commitment or a forward-looking vision.

A conceivable rationale is the EU's failure to attract significant Taiwanese investment, despite being Taiwan's primary investor. Economist and frequent China-US Focus contributor Alicia García Herrero [suggests](#) establishing a framework to promote and facilitate increased Taiwanese investment. However, the EU's recent actions appear to be moving in the opposite direction.

This brings us to the question of whether Europe finds itself compelled to adopt a balancing act, somehow reminiscent of small island nations. Navigating between trade imperatives and geopolitical pressures becomes especially challenging when Taiwan faces mounting diplomatic seclusion, and the election's outcome will potentially influence regional dynamics in the foreseeable future. Thus, determining the judicious course of action becomes paramount.

In light of these complexities, the EU could have chosen to actively engage in efforts to placate China, demonstrating a novel diplomatic approach and a willingness to make concessions for broader geopolitical considerations. Recognizing this appeasement as a fundamental EU approach underscores a deliberate policy decision, prompting a timely evaluation by EU institutions of potential ramifications and implications.

臺灣民眾統獨立場趨勢分佈 (1994~2023.06)  
Changes in the Unification - Independence Stances of Taiwanese  
as Tracked in Surveys by Election Study Center, NCCU (1994~2023.06)



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<https://esc.nccu.edu.tw/upload/44/doc/6963/Tondu202306.jpg>

European compliance with China's agenda facilitates the consolidation of Chinese influence within Europe. Consequently, Europe's global commitment to championing its principles weakens amid significant trade challenges once again. The growing disparity between grand declarations and tangible actions intensifies, notably following the Taiwan elections. Contradictory priorities and values complicate EU decision-making, paradoxically undermining the established status quo in the strait and diminishing the deterrence for potential security conflicts.

The EU's alignment with China requires careful consideration, with potential implications for Taiwan. Striking a balance, akin to other major powers that have successfully managed such complexities, is crucial. A comprehensive strategy includes engagement with Taiwan within present parameters—namely the 'One China policy', maintaining a stable position that neither overly favors China nor neglects Taiwan's concerns; collaborating with international actors for setting a cohesive approach, avoiding unilateral decisions; and proactively implementing conflict prevention measures, including negotiations and dialogue, to address disputes serenely.

Tensions are anticipated to persist at a low frequency until the upcoming U.S. election on November 5th, which will hold significant geopolitical implications for Taiwan. A potential Trump victory, reminiscent of his 2016 outreach to Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen, could provoke Chinese backlash, impacting the status quo. Preserving stability relies on the credibility of global powers in striking a subtle equilibrium. Europe, a potential pivotal player, must carefully consider moves to uphold credibility on the global stage and maintain a coherent and principled foreign policy.

