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# POLIS PAPER

WAR AND PEACE ACROSS THE TAIWAN  
STRAIT. EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVES ON  
POSSIBLE GEOPOLITICAL ESCALATION IN  
THE INDO-PACIFIC

*by Polis180 Fall Academy*

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## **I. INTRODUCTION**

Apart from current developments in Ukraine, there is scarcely a worse scenario imaginable for the European economy than an armed conflict in the Taiwan Strait.

Tensions have risen in recent years over the status of the self-governed region, which calls itself the Republic of China but is considered by the People's Republic of China (PRC or China hereafter) to be an integral part of its territory. US policymakers of all stripes seem convinced that an escalating tensions around Taiwan could be "only the precursor" to further Chinese expansionism in the region in the coming years<sup>1</sup>. Regional actors, including Japan and the Philippines, seem to share the analysis to a certain extent<sup>2</sup>, with Japan deeming the security of Taiwan as vital to its own national security<sup>3</sup>. This position was recently reinforced by Prime Minister Takaichi Sanae, who stated in November 2025 that a Chinese military attack on Taiwan could be seen as a "survival-threatening situation" for Japan and thus trigger a military response<sup>4</sup>. Despite these perspectives of its neighbours, China portrays itself as a status quo power in official sources<sup>5</sup>.

Without a doubt, the central role Taiwan plays in global economic supply chains should be recognised. A vast majority of the world's most advanced semiconductors are produced in Taiwan, making it an essential node in the supply chain network, currently irreplaceable for industries ranging from defence manufacturing to advanced technologies including artificial intelligence<sup>6</sup>. Armed aggression or an economic siege of the territory would disrupt shipments and production, dealing a blow to an increasingly troubled global economy. However, it remains debatable whether China intends to "recapture" Taiwan by force, through economic coercion or by other means. An additional weight should be given to the fact that the Taiwan Strait remains one of the most important routes for global trade, constituting over one fifth of annual maritime trade in the world<sup>7</sup>.

Whereas East Asian countries and the US have been paying closer attention to developments around the status of Taiwan, a genuine European discussion about the situation still seems to be in its infancy<sup>8</sup>. Given the economic implications mentioned above, the lack of strategic planning appears negligent. Even while ignoring the dominant position Taiwan holds in the production of semiconductors, the fact that a vibrant democracy with roughly

23 million inhabitants and an established civil society is threatened in its existence should alert to the EU if it considers its foundational norms and values relevant for its foreign policy<sup>9</sup>. The two-fold realisation that Taiwanese identity has clearly evolved over the past decades into a unique identity separate from a mainland Chinese one and that Taiwan fulfils the Montevideo criteria of state sovereignty should therefore be taken into consideration<sup>10</sup>.

During a three-day workshop in Berlin in October 2025, 28 participants from different academic and professional backgrounds collaborated to find initial policy suggestions for European lawmakers. In three working groups - strategic

considerations, economic dimensions, and European perspectives - they focused on some of the most pressing issues that have been neglected by European policymakers so far. Their findings are designed to inform decision-makers and other interested actors and serve as a first impulse to develop a clearer EU vision as to how a conflict can be avoided, without compromising the continent's security and economic foundations or its core values. While the findings can be at times frustrating, they should initiate conversations about the implications of a possible war or continued peace across the Taiwan Strait. In order to avoid risks from increasing, it is necessary to initiate constructive and forward-looking discussions.

## **A. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

- **Conduct scenario planning for potential escalation** and maintain transatlantic coordination, deepen Indo-Pacific partnerships, and expand European defence-industrial capacities in the short and medium term (0-24 months).
- **Establish a regular European presence in the region**, strengthen hard-power capabilities at home, and formalise permanent defence cooperation with regional partners in the long term (24+ months).
- **Implement a "Chokepoint Program"**: Identify for critical value chain nodes combined with harmonised EU-wide export controls to protect sensitive technology and incentivise diversification.
- **Utilise market access as leverage**: Gradually apply anti-subsidies and reciprocal market access measures in strategic sectors to effectively reduce asymmetric dependencies on China and create a level playing field.

- **Strengthen EU-Taiwan relations:** Enhance cooperation in strategic fields while fostering a structured dialogue and aligning policies to build resilience.
- **Boost EU diplomacy and regional cooperation:** Increase EU Member States' focus on Taiwan in diplomatic efforts and strengthen partnerships with like-minded regional actors for security, trade, and infrastructure resilience.

## II. LEGAL AND STRATEGIC CONSIDERATIONS

### A. INTERNATIONAL LAW AND DIPLOMACY

A destabilisation of cross-strait relations and the status quo of Taiwan bears not only regional risks but also threatens Europe's political, legal, and economic security. This subchapter focuses on the normative and diplomatic significance of preserving Taiwan's de facto autonomy.

Taiwan represents a like-minded democratic partner, especially when compared to the autocratic model in place across the Taiwan Strait<sup>11</sup>. Even a gradual, non-violent absorption of Taiwan under Beijing's "peaceful reunification" framework would harm European interests by undermining a democratic partner whose political system, civil rights, and liberties mirror Europe's fundamental values, such as freedom, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law<sup>12</sup>. Such a development would signal further erosion of the rules-based international order, particularly the principle of territorial integrity, that the EU has

pledged to uphold under its 2022 Strategic Compass<sup>13</sup>.

From an international law perspective, Taiwan's status as a de facto state confers specific protections. Although Taiwan is not a UN member, it fulfils the criteria of de facto statehood: a defined territory and permanent population, an effective government, and the capacity to enter international relations. International law literature and even the German Bundestag's Research Services argue that de facto regimes fall under the prohibition of the use of force enshrined in Article 2(4) of the UN Charter<sup>14</sup>. Any attempt to invade, occupy, or annexe Taiwan would therefore constitute a fundamental violation of international law. Taiwan, as such, possesses the right to individual self-defence under Article 51 of the UN Charter. Consequently, the Chinese framing of a potential conflict as a purely "internal matter" holds no weight under widely accepted international law.

China has intensified its legal, diplomatic, and discursive campaign to delegitimise Taiwan's international status through a

“lawfare” approach<sup>15</sup>. Hereby, the Chinese government instrumentalises Western-founded legal terminology and international institutions to promote its political objectives. Central to this effort is the distortive framing of UN General Assembly Resolution 2758 (1971), which recognises Beijing as “the only legitimate representative of China to the United Nations” but does not determine the sovereignty or representation of Taiwan<sup>16</sup>. Further, Beijing interprets international human rights norms rather selectively. China advances a sovereignty-centred, state-centric, and relativistic conception of human rights “with Chinese characteristics”, in which human rights are treated as an internal affair rather than a legitimate concern of the international community<sup>17</sup>.

The European Parliament has repeatedly clarified that Resolution 2758 addresses the status of the People’s Republic of China, but that it does not determine whether Beijing enjoys sovereignty over Taiwan nor contains any judgment on the future inclusion of Taiwan in the UN or other international organisations<sup>18</sup>. Despite this, Beijing has used the resolution to exclude Taiwan from international organisations such as the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO), conflating the UN General Assembly’s (UNGA)

“China seat” decision of 1971 with a global endorsement of its “One-China Principle.”

However, the majority of UN Member States (142 countries) have already expressed positions aligning with Beijing’s narrative that Taiwan is part of the PRC<sup>19</sup>. This widespread acceptance risks normalising Beijing’s interpretation and eroding the international community’s capacity to oppose coercive unification attempts. Europe must therefore not only maintain a clear and consistent stance in rejecting Beijing’s interpretation but also intensify the clarity and determination with which it articulates and defends this position. As a matter of diplomatic practice, the EU and its Member States act under their commitment to the “One China Policy”, thus not following Beijing’s lead. Unlike the One China Principle, the One China Policy merely acknowledges China’s position regarding Taiwan and recognises Beijing as the sole Chinese representation. However, it allows for continued societal, economic, and even political relations with Taipei without maintaining official diplomatic ties<sup>20</sup>.

The following section outlines the key challenges Europe faces vis-a-vis China when it comes to the status of Taiwan.

## 1. DIPLOMATIC AND LEGAL CHALLENGES FOR EUROPE

- **Normative challenge:** Europe's "One China Policy" risks being conflated with Beijing's "One-China principle." The former refers to diplomatic recognition of Beijing as China's government, while the latter asserts Taiwan's belonging to the PRC. This interpretation is not accepted by the EU or its Member States. Beijing's success in exporting its terminology through UN agencies contributes to this conflation.
- **Institutional challenge:** Taiwan's exclusion from the UN and affiliated organisations in any form undermines both international cooperation and European interests in areas such as health, climate, and technology. China's veto power in UN agencies limits Europe's ability to promote universal representation and technical expertise.
- **Legal challenge:** China's domestic legislation and "Three Warfares" strategy (psychological, legal, and public opinion operations) weaponise

international legal norms to delegitimise Taiwan's sovereignty. The June 2024 "guidelines" threatening criminal penalties, including capital punishment, for so-called Taiwan independence advocacy - even with extraterritorial reach - exemplify this legal coercion<sup>21</sup>.

- **Narrative challenge:** Beijing's dominance in international discourse allows it to frame Taiwan as an "internal issue" while portraying EU support as interference. State-owned media outlets and other institutions amplify this framing in Europe, necessitating alternative platforms for academic and cultural exchange<sup>22</sup>.
- **Political challenge:** Divergent Member States' approaches hinder a coherent EU stance. Without greater alignment, Europe risks losing both credibility and leverage in shaping international responses to cross-strait developments.

We suggest the following concrete steps the EU and its Member States could take to address these challenges:

## 2. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Acknowledge Taiwan as a democratic and ideological partner**

Brussels should more assertively recognise Taiwan as a democracy with shared values and a symbiotic partner for cooperation and learning. The EU and Member States should expand soft-power engagement through academic, municipal, and civil-society

channels: university partnerships, city-to-city cooperations, think tank and NGO exchanges as well as youth mobility schemes. Dedicated EU instruments (scholarships, Horizon Europe, Erasmus+) could be expanded to include Taiwan as a priority partner. Such engagement reinforces Taiwan's international visibility without breaching the EU's formal One-China policy.

- **Reinforce Taiwan's de facto sovereignty under international law**

The EU and its Member States should emphasise Taiwan's status as a de facto sovereign state fulfilling the criteria of statehood under international law. Europe should explicitly and determinedly highlight in international platforms that any violent interference by China would constitute a violation of the UN Charter, triggering the right to individual and collective self-defence. In multilateral fora, Europe should lead initiatives to support Taiwan's participation in organisations not requiring statehood (e.g. WHO, ICAO and others) on functional grounds. The EU should reference the Charter of Fundamental Rights, and the European Convention on Human Rights to frame Taiwan's defence as consistent with Europe's legal and moral obligations to protect human dignity and self-determination.

- **Counter Beijing's misuse of UNGA Resolution 2758**

Europe should take the lead in publicising the original intent of Resolution 2758: that it pertains only to Chinese representation in the UN, not to the status of Taiwan. The EU and Member States should issue formal statements rejecting Beijing's conflation of this resolution with sovereignty claims and urging the UN Secretariat to ensure transparency regarding its agreements with China on Taiwan-related terminology and participation<sup>23</sup>. Europe should coordinate with like-minded partners to develop alternative diplomatic language for cross-strait issues, avoiding terms such as "reunification" or "internal conflict" that have been coined by Beijing. Instead, they should emphasise "peaceful relations," "status quo preservation," and "stability across the Taiwan Strait," while explicitly contesting China's narrative, and instead amplify an interpretation of these terms in line with international law.

- **Build coalitions and reshape multilateral discourse**

Europe should form coalitions within the UN and its specialised agencies to challenge Beijing's restrictive influence. This includes aligning with states such as Japan, Canada, and Australia to co-sponsor motions advocating for Taiwan's observer status in global bodies and to counteract resolutions employing Chinese terminology. Europe's diplomatic missions should also engage in strategic communication to highlight the



incompatibility between Beijing's claims and international law, thereby countering the trend in which 74% of UN members currently echo Beijing's position<sup>24</sup>. Supporting civil society dialogue platforms in Asia that advocate for Taiwan's inclusion would diversify discourse and reduce dependence on Chinese-controlled channels. Offering alternatives to Chinese investment pushes worldwide to countries from the Global South should become more coordinated.

- **Strengthen legal resilience and information integrity in Europe**

To safeguard its own public discourse, European states should conduct an evaluation of Confucius Institutes and academic programmes sponsored by the PRC, ensuring transparency of funding and intellectual independence. Simultaneously, the EU should fund independent research institutes and think tanks on cross-strait relations and language programmes that promote critical engagement rather than state-controlled narratives. This aims to ensure that European academic and diplomatic understandings of cross-strait relations remain pluralist.

The EU's response to the Taiwan question must transcend symbolic gestures. The credibility of the EU's fundamental values and its geopolitical interests hinge on its ability to translate its normative commitments into coherent legal and diplomatic action. By affirming Taiwan's de facto sovereignty, questioning and, if necessary, resisting Beijing's approach, Europe can help preserve both regional stability and the integrity of the international rules-based order it claims to defend

## **B. STRATEGIC REFLECTIONS**

Building upon these findings, it must be stated that European and Indo-Pacific security is interconnected in significant ways. The US remains the main provider of security for European NATO countries, as well as for East Asian democracies such as Japan and South Korea as well as Taiwan. Because of Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine, Japan and South Korea have considered or provided aid to

Ukraine. They have also supported sanctions against Russia, fearing a similar move by China against Taiwan<sup>25</sup>. Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine and subsequent Western sanctions on Moscow have additionally resulted in an increased level of cooperation between Russia, China, and North Korea. Beijing actively enables the Kremlin to sustain its war effort through trade in energy and dual-use capabilities<sup>26</sup>. Any deterioration of the status quo in the Indo-Pacific could compel the US

to divert more resources to the region, potentially encouraging Russia to exploit European vulnerabilities and attack a NATO member<sup>27</sup>. Thus, Europe has a fundamental interest in upholding the status

quo in the Indo-Pacific, particularly in the Taiwan Strait.

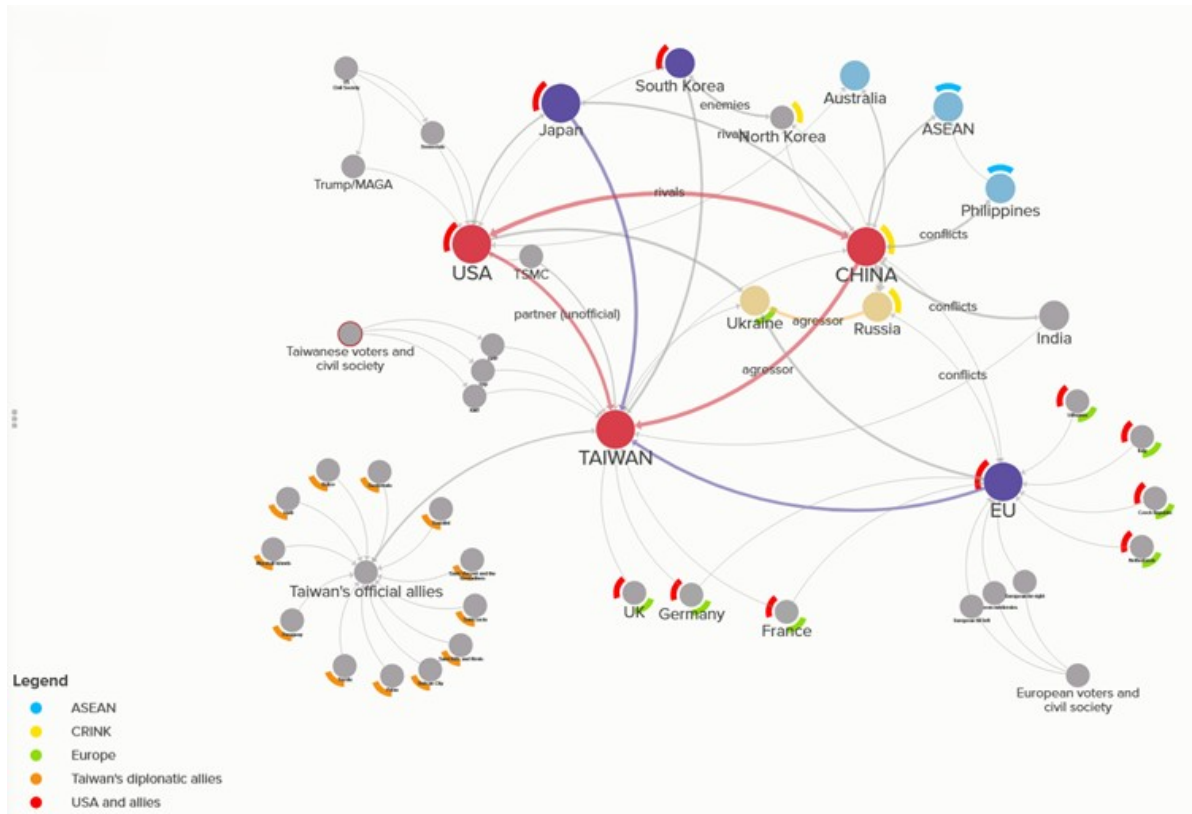


Figure 1: An actor-mapping showing the different stakeholders in the security of Taiwan. (Author's own)

The Strategic Compass of the EU, which Member States have unanimously agreed upon, aims at transforming the EU into a geopolitical actor to uphold the rules-based international order. To this end, the EU and Member States have undergone fundamental shifts in their foreign and security policies, with the decision at the 2025 NATO Summit in The Hague to spend 5% of GDP on defence being one clear example<sup>28</sup>. European capacity, however, remains tightly focused on

supporting Ukraine and strengthening national forces for territorial defence. While Europe has demonstrated symbolic commitment through limited deployments, its Indo-Pacific engagement remains minimal<sup>29</sup>. Yet this limited engagement fails to reflect the region's significance for European security. The following short-, medium-, and long-term policy measures are proposed to ensure its strategic importance is adequately addressed.

## 1. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Short term (6-12 months): Build robust scenario plans and response options while expanding intelligence, cyber, and military cooperation with Indo-Pacific partners through joint exercises and information sharing to build understanding**

The EU must identify and map potential Taiwan scenarios - ranging from cyber and information operations to quarantine<sup>i</sup>, blockade or invasion contingencies - and define corresponding response options with clear coordination frameworks. Simultaneously, expanding Member State participation in naval and air exercises with regional partners would provide operational knowledge of regional geography, logistics routes, and Chinese coercive patterns, which is essential to realistic scenario planning. Intelligence co-operation with the US, Japan, and selected like-minded partners should be intensified to track Chinese military movements and patterns in the Indo-Pacific. Europe should establish standing technical exchange channels to assist Taiwan in hardening critical digital infrastructure, satellite communications, and power networks against coordinated cyberattacks and electronic warfare. This should entail increased cooperation with Member States of existing regional defence groupings such as AUKUS (Australia, United Kingdom, US), the Quadrilateral Security Dialog, or Quad (Australia, India, Japan, US)<sup>30</sup>.

- **Medium term (12-30 months): Ramp up Europe's defence-industrial production of asymmetric weapon systems and unify transatlantic planning and response**

Europe must expand its defence-industrial output and establish dedicated production lines for systems intended for export to support Taiwan's asymmetric defence capabilities<sup>31</sup>. Priorities include air-defence missiles, mobile coastal anti-ship systems, Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAV), counter-UAV technology, and precision munitions, with coordinated production through the EU's new procurement mechanisms<sup>32</sup>. Shared scenario planning with Indo-Pacific partners and across the Atlantic would reinforce Europe's own defence, which would free up US assets for forward deployment in Asia, and thereby strengthen deterrence in the Taiwan Strait.

- **Long term (24+ months): Establish a sustained European security presence in the region, strengthen Europe's hard-power capabilities at home, and formalise**

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<sup>i</sup> A **blockade** is a full military cutoff of trade and energy routes and would be seen as an act of war, while a **quarantine** is a limited, quasi-civil measure - such as inspections or shipping controls - used to pressure Taiwan without openly declaring war.

### **permanent defence partnerships with South Korea, Japan, Australia, the Philippines, and India**

The aim is to reach steady situational awareness and the ability to operate alongside partners in crisis management scenarios. To this end, Europe must institutionalise its cooperation with close regional partners - South Korea, Japan, Australia, the Philippines, and India - through permanent working groups on maritime security, logistics resilience, and increased joint exercises. Regular staff exchanges, shared situational reporting, and the implementation of interoperability standards will anchor Europe as a long-term contributor to peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific.

### **III. ECONOMIC DIMENSION: SUPPLY CHAIN AND TRADE RELATIONS**

It has long been argued that mutual interdependence forms the basis for a strong counterweight to international conflict<sup>33</sup>. Nevertheless, future insecurity, such as increased protectionism or severing of access to vital goods, could be more likely to push states to start trade conflicts. This could happen regardless of the volume of trade that is taking place. Such insecurities not only encompass traditional fields such as energy security, but also new and emerging contexts such as financial and information markets<sup>34</sup>.

The country continues to liberalise in non-sensitive sectors (consumer markets, services) but restricts access in areas deemed critical to sovereignty and security, creating a dual structure of openness and protectionism. Meanwhile, Beijing has been building up its capabilities in

weaponising existing economic interdependence in these fields<sup>35</sup>. The Dual Circulation Framework, first mentioned in 2020, establishes both an internal circulation (domestic consumption, innovation, and supply chains) as well as keeping external circulation (trade, investment, technology exchange) selectively open<sup>36</sup>. China treats economic openness as a national security issue, tightening control over data, technology, and capital flows in strategic sectors, while promoting “autonomous and controllable” domestic capacities<sup>37</sup>.

## A. MAPPING EU TRADE IMBALANCES AND SUPPLY CHAINS WITH CHINA AND TAIWAN

### 1. EU-CHINA TRADE OVERVIEW

Over the past decade, China has become the EU's largest source of manufactured imports and a critical partner in sectors such as machinery, electronics, and green technologies. However, this scale of integration also exposes the EU to significant supply chain dependencies and competitive pressures in strategic industries.

Against this backdrop, the trade relationship stands at the intersection of economic necessity and geopolitical tension, making it a central focus of EU industrial and trade policy debates.

*Figure 2 tracks the evolution of EU-China trade flows and the widening trade deficit over the past decade. While exports to China have seen moderate growth, imports have surged significantly, culminating in a record deficit of over €300 billion in 2024.*

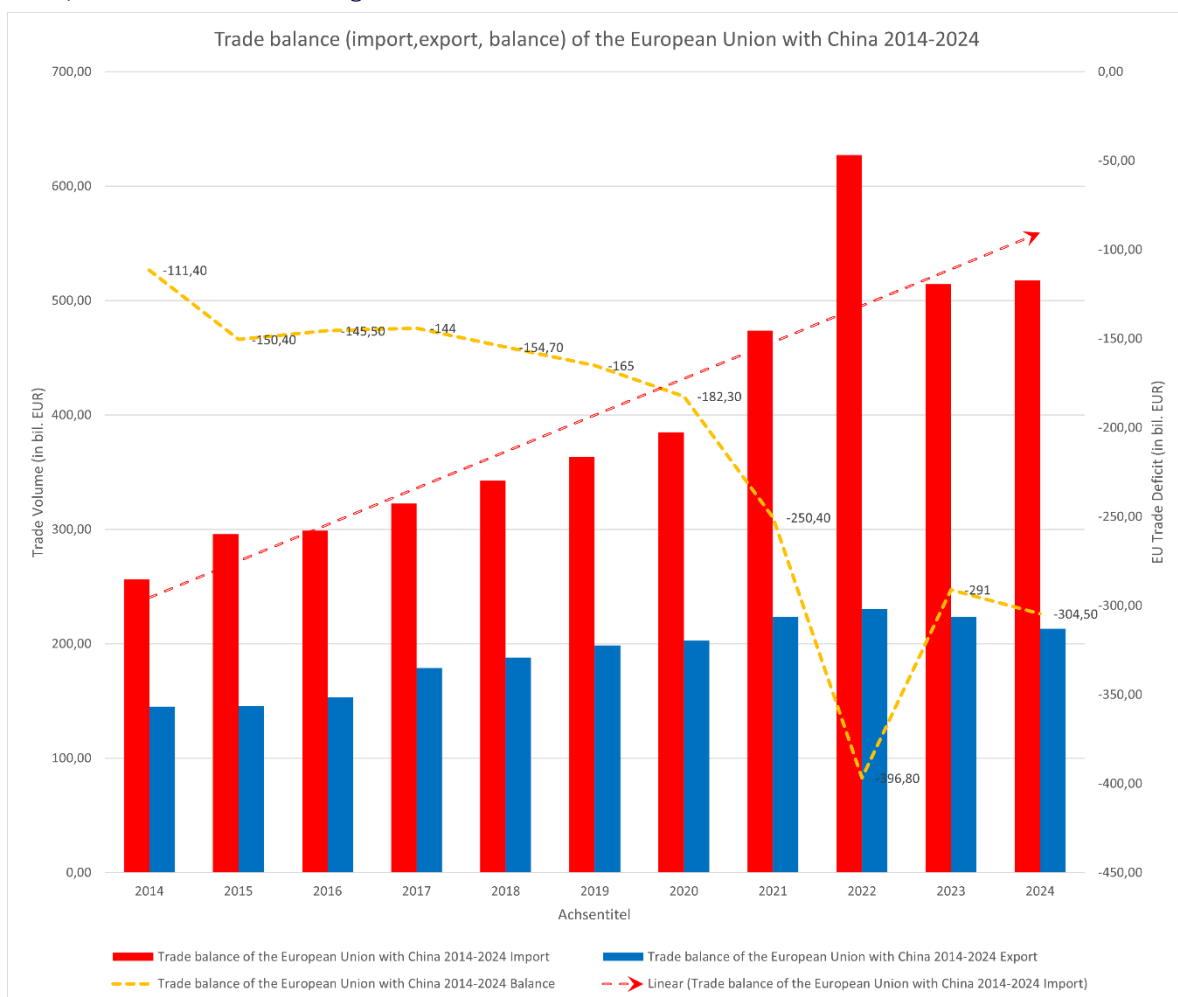


Figure 2: EU-China trade balance 2014-2024 (Author's own, based on Ma, 2025a.)

Figure 3 contrasts the EU's imports and exports with China across the top ten product categories, showing a pronounced imbalance in categories like

machinery, clothing, and other manufactures, underscoring Europe's heavy reliance on Chinese supply in these sectors.

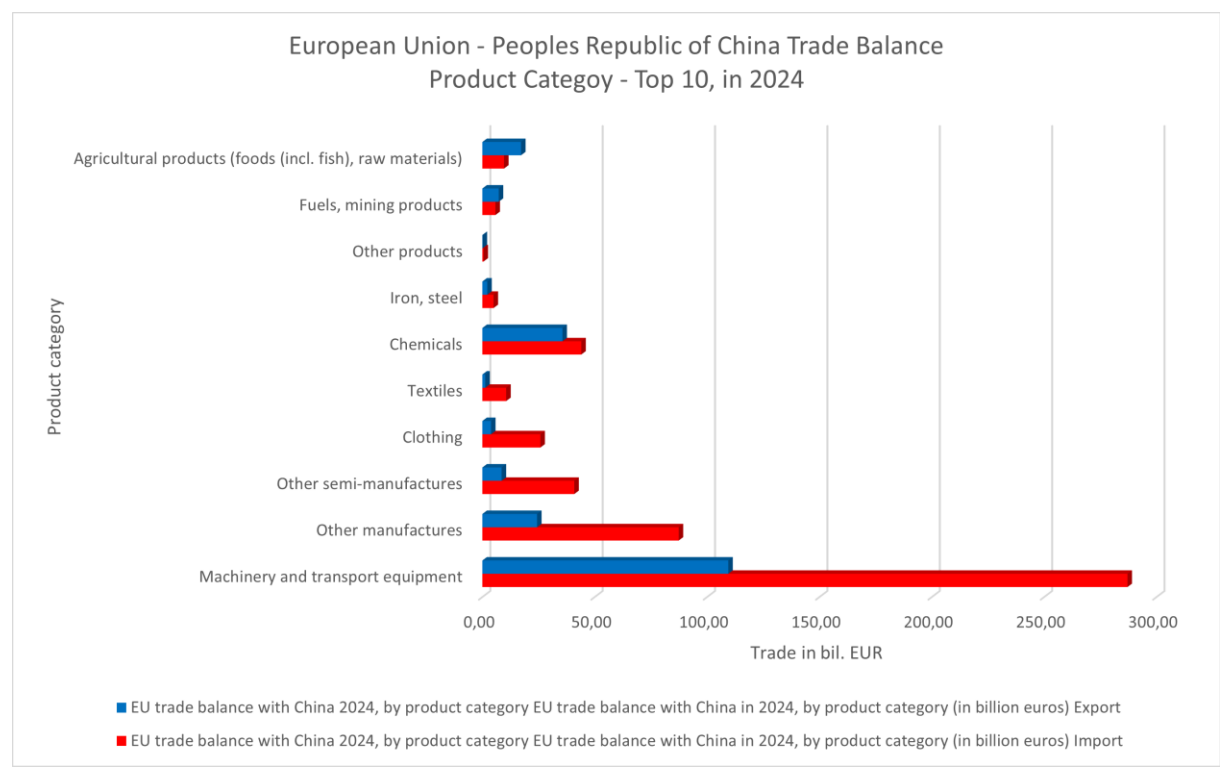


Figure 3: EU-China trade balance by product category, 2024 (Author's own, data based on: Ma, 2025b.)

2. EU-TAIWAN TRADE OVERVIEW

The EU's trade relations with Taiwan are characterised by moderate but strategically significant volumes, deeply tied to high-tech sectors and intermediate goods. While smaller in scale, the EU-Taiwan trade corridor is increasingly relevant in the context of supply chain diversification, geopolitical alignment, and semiconductor dependency. The following section offers a quantitative overview of the EU-Taiwan trade balance and structure, with a

focus on the year 2024 and trend developments over the past decade.

Figure 4 displays steady growth in both imports and exports between the EU and Taiwan. While the trade deficit has widened slightly, it remains modest compared to the EU-China imbalance. Importantly, the linear trends indicate a healthy bilateral trade growth trajectory, with a manageable and stable deficit profile.

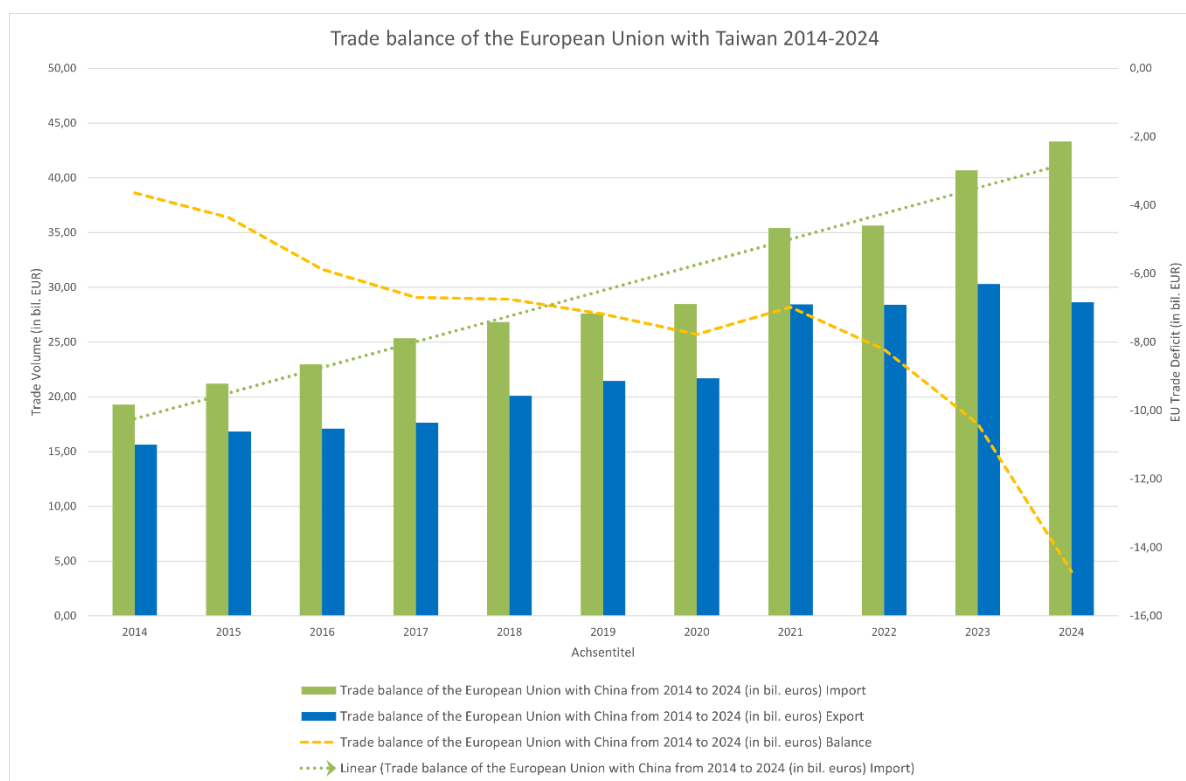


Figure 4: EU-Taiwan trade balance, 2014-2024 (Author's own, data based on: European Commission, 2025.)

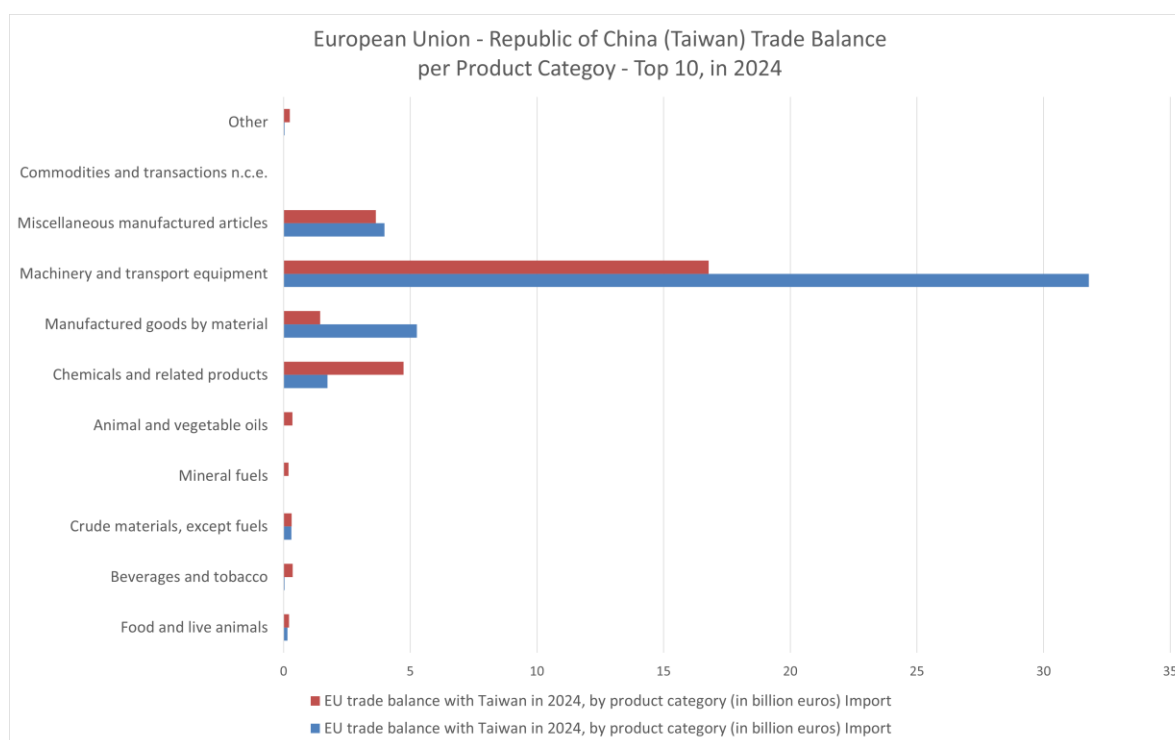


Figure 5: EU-Taiwan trade balance by product category, 2024 (Author's own, data based on: European Commission, 2025.)

Figure 5 compares imports and exports between the EU and Taiwan by product category. The largest trade volumes are

found in machinery and transport equipment, where the EU has a significant trade deficit, reflecting Taiwan's key role in



*advanced manufacturing. In contrast, chemicals and manufactured goods by material show a more balanced exchange.*

EU trade with Taiwan is smaller in volume, but it still plays a critical role in strategic sectors, particularly those related to digital infrastructure and technology. The data presented here supports the need for deepening economic ties and reinforcing resilience through aligned partnerships in areas where the EU seeks to reduce over-dependence on more politically exposed suppliers.

As trade imbalances grow, particularly in high-tech and green sectors, so too does the strategic relevance of the EU's market power. The next chapter examines how access to the European single market can, in certain instances, be leveraged as a geopolitical and economic tool.

## **B. KEY LEVERAGE POINTS AND RECOMMENDED FIELDS ACTION FOR THE EU**

The EU remains one of China's largest export destinations, particularly for electric vehicles (EVs), lithium-ion batteries, solar panels, and other green technology products. China's trade surplus with the EU reached record levels in recent years, largely driven by these sectors. This dependency provides the EU with potential leverage through employing trade instruments, such as tariffs, anti-subsidy

investigations, import restrictions, or market access limitations targeting strategic industries. For instance, the ongoing EU anti-subsidy investigation into Chinese EV imports demonstrates how trade instruments can exert political and economic pressure.

### **1. EUROPEAN TECHNOLOGY AND MACHINERY**

China's industrial base depends heavily on high-end European manufacturing technology and machinery, particularly from Germany, Italy, and the Netherlands. Key sectors include:

- Semiconductor equipment (lithography systems from ASML)
- Automotive and precision engineering machinery (Siemens, Bosch, Trumpf)
- Chemical processing equipment and industrial catalysts (BASF, Evonik)
- Automation and robotics used in advanced manufacturing and battery production
- Gallium and Germanium refinement (Freiberg Compound Materials)

These dependencies give the EU significant technological leverage, especially if coordinated with export controls already in place under the EU's Economic Security Strategy (2023) and in alignment with US export restrictions.



## **2. FINANCIAL SYSTEMS**

Despite efforts to build alternatives, Chinese firms remain deeply integrated into Western financial, logistical, and regulatory infrastructures for now. This includes the SWIFT payment system, European shipping networks as well as dollar- or euro-denominated financing. The EU's coordination with like-minded partners, also beyond Europe through shared export control and sanctions regimes (e.g. against Russia), shows how coalition-based economic statecraft could also be applied to China in a potential Taiwan-related contingency. This Chinese dependence provides leverage through coordinated sanctions, export control coalitions, and restrictions on capital flows.

These interdependencies could be used in a limited and well-considered fashion. Beijing is aware of how to use “chokepoints” in global supply chains, as recent export restrictions to critical raw materials have demonstrated. Europe's key exports, which would be difficult to substitute at the moment, could be leveraged in a similar strategic approach. It must be considered, however, that such a move could lead China to diversify supply chains or develop its own production capabilities in the long term, thus rendering the

chokepoints used by Europe strategically irrelevant.

## **IV. EUROPEAN STRATEGIC AUTONOMY**

It appears necessary, first of all, to explain the term “strategic autonomy”. The term is often related to the relations Brussels maintains with Washington and Beijing<sup>38</sup>. This chapter will explain the EU's understanding of “strategic autonomy” in its external action toward China and Taiwan. It focuses on three areas usually included in deliberations regarding strategic autonomy: the military, the economy as well as normative aspects.

### **A. MILITARY PERSPECTIVE**

Given the limited resources of EU actors and their dependence on US logistics and intelligence, achieving actual strategic autonomy is currently far from realistic. At present, EU Member States do not act as a unified ‘security provider’ for Taiwan. Still, if the EU's foreign policy objective is to contribute to a rules-based international order, there are core European interests to be defended in the Taiwan Strait by keeping a peaceful status quo between China and Taiwan.

In order to defend its interests and become a strategically autonomous actor, the EU can participate in regional military exercises, as already suggested in the first

chapter. Ways could be explored for EU Member States to participate not only under their own flags, but also consciously and demonstratively as EU members. Some EU missions, including counter-piracy efforts (ATALANTA) or those fighting extremist religious forces (EUTM in Mali), could be seen as precursors for the use of the European flag<sup>39</sup>. This would enable the EU to be perceived as a security-promoting and autonomous actor in the Indo-Pacific.

Any EU missions in the Indo-Pacific are, however, not feasible, nor would they serve European strategic interests. However, smaller steps could be taken. One concrete example for possible action regarding Taiwan on a strategic level could be drone production. Drones dominate current strategic debates and are expected to gain importance, as seen on battlefields in Ukraine and beyond. While there are significant differences between battlefields in Ukraine and the geographical preconditions found on and around Taiwan, one should keep in mind that relatively cheap drone technology can offer the militarily weaker side a temporary advantage<sup>40</sup>.

Regarding the EU's capacity to effectively react to escalating tensions, EU diplomats should play an enhanced role in executing

contingency plans. Predetermined communication channels can increase the EU's ability to coordinate as soon as the tensions between Beijing and Taipei arise dramatically. There should be an EU "exit plan" for the evacuation of EU citizens and Taiwanese local staff working for the EU or Member States. Thus, the EU would be less dependent on partners such as the US in case of an escalation regarding information.

## **B. ECONOMIC PERSPECTIVE**

The EU has the ability to strengthen its economic resilience and autonomy by reducing dependencies on third countries for critical goods, technologies, or markets. The EU needs to manage major dependencies in the region, primarily the dependency on China's rare earth components used for advanced technological applications, with 98% of exports originating from mainland China<sup>41</sup>. Meanwhile, Taiwan's semiconductor production, especially TSMC as the largest supplier to the EU, accounts for 22% of final product imports<sup>42</sup>, while over 80% of suppliers to EU enterprises have their headquarters abroad, reflecting the overall vulnerability of semiconductor supply<sup>43</sup>. Due to the EU's overreliance on Chinese rare earths and Taiwanese semiconductors, an escalating conflict around Taiwan would cause

severe damage across numerous critical industries and supply chains, including automotive and consumer electronic products<sup>44</sup>. This could occur if the supply of semiconductors was interrupted by a potential physical blockage across the Taiwan Strait<sup>45</sup> or, if tensions rose even further, the outbreak of an armed conflict. More importantly, rare earths remain crucial to the EU's production of military equipment and other technologies for strategic use<sup>46</sup>. For example, rare-earth element (REE) magnets are needed for components of fighter jets, yet the EU has a total reliance on Chinese supply. Current Chinese export controls on REEs highlight the challenge that overreliance on China poses to the EU's economic security strategic autonomy<sup>47</sup>. In view of this, the production of critical raw materials should be transferred to the EU. This, however, would be a cost-intensive investment<sup>48</sup>.

To decrease its dependency, Europe must accelerate the development of its own capabilities for mining, processing, refining, and recycling of REEs, for both civilian and defence-industrial uses (including permanent magnets, sensors, or guidance systems). An example of domestic rare earth lithium extraction is the Vulcan Energy Startup in Karlsruhe, Germany<sup>49</sup>. Diversifying the EU's supply via trade partnerships with resource-rich countries

such as Australia and Norway under high environmental, social, and governance (ESG) standards is also key to decreasing reliance on China.

In terms of regulation, the EU should further reform its 2024 Critical Raw Materials Act, which commits the region to securing a resilient and reliable supply. When updating the regulatory framework, it can draw on the experience of countries like Japan, which have successfully increased supply chain resilience<sup>50</sup>. Finally, building strategic stockpiles, encouraging recycling and reuse, and investing in upstream value chains (processing and refining) are crucial next steps.

Further, the EU should strengthen its partnership with Taiwan on a technical level due to the EU's lack of technical knowledge regarding semiconductor and microchip production. In terms of semiconductors, cooperation with companies such as TSMC helps bringing production to Europe and has been undertaken in initial flagship projects such as a TSMC production plant in Dresden, Germany. The founding of this European Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (ESMC), a joint venture of TSMC and companies including Bosch, is supposed to allow for semiconductor production starting in 2027<sup>51</sup>. It can therefore be seen as part of a mid-

term strategy for increased European autonomy<sup>52</sup>, so that the EU gains further strategic autonomy in the production of semiconductors. Further knowledge exchange with countries such as Japan and South Korea, as well as establishing local production sites, is key to reducing reliance and derisking.

Admittedly, the EU can only gradually enhance its economic resilience and reduce economic dependencies in the mid-term and long-term because of two reasons: first, Taiwanese outperformance in semiconductor production compared with other countries, and second, enhanced difficulties in extracting and refining rare earths in places other than the Chinese mainland, which can only be achieved at the earliest in 2030<sup>53</sup>. The EU should mainly conduct constructive and necessary partnerships with Taiwan within its strategic considerations, and not frame them as a form of rivalry against China<sup>54</sup>.

### **C. NORMATIVE PERSPECTIVE**

The EU's foreign policy is based on Brussels' image as a normative power and thus an actor that shapes international relations by promoting the rule of law, democracy, dialogue, and a rules-based international order<sup>55</sup>. This normative orientation should

also shape European approaches to any conflict across the Taiwan Strait. Against the backdrop of increasing geopolitical tensions, the EU maintains comprehensive, albeit non-diplomatic, relations with Taiwan in various areas such as trade, technology, education, and human rights<sup>56</sup>. This form of cooperation is based on shared values and makes Taiwan a like-minded partner. A value-based but nonetheless pragmatic partnership with Taiwan offers the EU the opportunity to combine its normative credibility with strategic caution.

The close alignment with Taiwan on such matters is particularly striking when compared directly with China, which also operates on differently defined values<sup>2</sup>. This begins with the understanding of "democracy", which Beijing does not understand as concordant with liberal democracy, but as democratic centralism, with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) as the highest representative of the Chinese people and no possibility of transferring power. Other examples include "sovereignty" is understood as absolute, permanent state authority over territory and law, as well as "non-interference" and "defence of national interests", which are further key principles.

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<sup>2</sup> See for example *Decoding China Project gGmbH*. (2025). Imprint. <https://decodingchina.eu/imprint/>

The CCP frequently uses ideological terminology which appears straightforward in its meaning. Its slogans evoke strong emotional feelings and, according to the official definition, are “concise, powerful language forms used to promote Party ideology, mobilise the masses, and guide public opinion”<sup>57</sup>. This reinterpretation of terms could have a lasting impact regarding cooperation and international expectations, as it redefines fundamental principles such as “democracy” or “civil society”.

Regarding the democratic process in Taiwan, Chinese influence in civil society has become more visible<sup>58</sup>. Misinformation, disinformation, and narratives aligned with Chinese Communist Party interpretations are often disseminated via social media, trying to undermine public trust in Taiwanese narratives and institutions. China also deploys disinformation campaigns to redefine the concepts mentioned above. Videos on several social media platforms

frequently use the the term “freedom of speech”, portraying China as equally respectful of public expression. Others define China as a “democracy”, where people can live their own lives, ignoring severe limitations to participation in politics or expressing dissent<sup>59</sup>.

The rules-based international order relies on consensus about core values among partners. By drawing on its experience with countering disinformation and defending democracy through protecting the integrity of information, the EU can use its normative power to align intelligence efforts, cooperate with Taiwan, and strengthen resilience against disinformation. The EU would also profit from increased exchanges with Taiwan regarding the fight against disinformation to enhance its own resilience. Resulting from the interdependency between the EU, Taiwan and China, the EU should take concrete measures.

## D. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Vis-a-vis China**, the EU and Member States should contribute to maintaining a peaceful status quo between Taipei and Beijing while reducing economic dependencies on China.
- **Regarding Taiwan**, the EU should increase cooperation efforts to combat disinformation and enhance information security. A structured EU-Taiwan dialogue on this matter should be introduced.
- **Regarding third countries in the region**, the EU should increase cooperation with ASEAN countries and like-minded partners. Cooperation should include security cooperation, contingency planning, and sanctions readiness. Furthermore, semiconductor supply-chain resilience and rare-earth supply should be a central topic of future negotiations with partners in the Indo-Pacific.

## V. CONCLUSION

The recommendations given in this paper are designed to help lawmakers and other interested actors to navigate the increasingly difficult waters around the Taiwan Strait. Taking into consideration the findings mentioned before, it becomes apparent that EU lawmakers and their counterparts in European capitals are in need to find new approaches to developments in the Taiwan Strait.

European complacency regarding China has served the interests of industry so far - allowing for easy access to one of the world's largest markets. But with increasing competitiveness displayed by Chinese firms as well as Beijing's growing assertiveness regarding its territorial claims over Taiwan and other areas, the EU and

its Member States need to adjust to a changing status quo in East Asia.

With the US becoming more self-absorbed during the second Trump administration, Europe as a whole needs to become more of a strategic actor. Being able to forecast potential escalations around Taiwan would not only help European industry dependent on semiconductors, but also allow for less dependence on others such as Washington. The US appears more focused on a potential conflict with China than on the European theatre, leaving less defence capabilities for Western Europe. An armed conflict over Taiwan would thus have an immediate impact on the EU.

Both China and Taiwan will, for the foreseeable future, remain important to the EU. Both for imports and exports, they remain integral parts of the global economy.

However, China's increased use of economic coercion, as seen with rare earth processing and others, calls for a coordinated response not only from Brussels but Europe in general. While Chinese dependencies on Europe have shrunk, the PRC still relies on the continent for a few specific fields and products. While using those economic chokepoints for strategic ends should not occur without thorough deliberations, existing possibilities should be explored and carefully analysed.

Finally, the EU remains one of the most steadfast defenders of a rules-based international order. Being able to rely on international treaties and agreements made between different nations and economic blocks has helped the European single market to profit from an increasingly interconnected world. Values such as human rights, democracy and the rule of law in general have become hallmarks of the international community, also thanks to European assertiveness. While other regions of the world, including China, have caught up or are in the process of catching up with Western economies, partners such as Taiwan show that such values are not merely Western constructs, but remain cherished across cultural or regional barriers. Allowing for a fully developed democracy such as Taiwan to be absorbed by China would seriously undermine the

very foundation that has led the EU to become one of the strongest supporters of international norms.

The EU thus has its work cut out for it when it comes to a potential conflict between Beijing and Taipei. Rapid adjustment is becoming increasingly important.



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**POLIS 180 –**

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