

# Europe's Eyes on Taiwan: Strategic Ties, Different Perspectives

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# **CENTRE FOR SECURITY, DIPLOMACY AND STRATEGY**

## **CSDS IN DEPTH**

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This In-Depth Paper is part of a broader “Taiwan Strait Update” series focusing on European perspectives on Taiwan and China’s strategic adjustment in Europe.



**BRUSSELS SCHOOL OF GOVERNANCE**

**CENTRE FOR SECURITY,  
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## Abstract

This CSDS In-Depth Paper, entitled “Europe’s Eyes on Taiwan: Strategic Ties, Different Perspectives”, examines the evolving perceptions of Taiwan across the 27 EU member states. It addresses how these views have evolved in recent years, especially as the EU has stepped up its own engagement with Taiwan. Through expert analyses, this In-Depth Paper explores each EU country’s stance on Taiwan and assesses key factors such as support for Taiwan’s democracy, its symbolic role in territorial independence, strategic supply chains, trade relations and more. The Paper also evaluates references to Taiwan in the national security strategies of EU member states and examines recent security-related activities, such as Freedom of Navigation Operations in and around the Taiwan Strait. Complementing these insights is an analysis of EU member states’ trade relations with China and Taiwan. This In-Depth Paper provides a nuanced understanding of how the interplay between economic and strategic considerations shapes EU member state policies toward Taiwan.



## Introduction

“Europe’s Eyes on Taiwan: Strategic Ties, Different Perspectives”, is a CSDS In-Depth Paper on the evolving perception of Taiwan by European Union (EU) member states. It revolves around the following questions: how do different EU member states perceive Taiwan? How and why have such perceptions evolved in recent years? These questions are particularly relevant given that the EU’s engagement towards Taiwan continues to grow.

This In-Depth Paper is based on a comprehensive compilation of analyses on the evolving positions of the 27 EU member states toward Taiwan. Each analysis has been prepared by individual experts, providing a deep dive into the unique perspectives and strategic considerations of their respective countries of analysis. Each country analysis explores the evolving nature of the country’s stance on Taiwan. Particular emphasis has been placed on identifying significant shifts in foreign policy discourse, with evidence drawn from official public statements, strategic documents and interviews.

Experts were asked to assess the key factors shaping each country’s approach to Taiwan, with particular attention to three dimensions:

- Political: how do political considerations – such as Taiwan’s efforts to defend its democracy in the face of an authoritarian People’s Republic of China (PRC) – influence EU member state perceptions?
- Economic: how does Taiwan’s role in critical supply chains – especially as a leading hub in the semiconductor industry – shape EU member states’ economic interests and policy choices?
- Strategic: how does Taiwan’s geostrategic position affect national assessments in the context of regional and global security dynamics?

Additionally, experts were instructed to analyse whether each country’s national security strategy (or equivalent document) mentioned Taiwan, and to assess any recent security-related engagements in the region, such as Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOPs), exchanges on Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI) or similar initiatives. The country analyses were further enriched by a comprehensive study examining the trade relations between EU member states and both China and Taiwan.

This part of the In-Depth Paper provides a critical backdrop to understanding the economic dimensions of policy decisions and the interplay between trade and geopolitics.

This In-Depth Paper highlights that while the EU maintains its “One China Policy”, Taiwan’s democratic values and role in global supply chains – especially semiconductors – have made it a more strategic partner. Economically, the disparity in trade volumes remains stark (i.e. EU member states conduct approximately ten times more trade with China than with Taiwan). Nevertheless, while most EU countries are actively working to reduce their economic dependence on China, some are simultaneously strengthening trade and investment ties with Taiwan. EU institutions have shown growing unity on Taiwan, notably through joint statements, but EU member states differ in emphasis due to historical ties, economic exposure and political priorities. The In-Depth Paper identifies three broad categories of EU member state approaches to Taiwan:

1. “the Balancers”: these are states, including most large EU economies, that seek to preserve strong security ties with the United States (US), maintain economic engagement with China and, oftentimes, defer contentious issues to the EU level;
2. “the Atlanticists”: these are states that align closely with the US, prioritise security concerns and values-based diplomacy and lead more vocal support for Taiwan;
3. “the Sino-Friendly states”: these states, still a minority in Europe, maintain closer ties with China and sometimes obstruct unified EU stances.

These diverging approaches highlight internal EU tensions and potential challenges in formulating a cohesive Taiwan policy going forward.

The preliminary findings from the In-Depth Paper have been presented and discussed in key regional and global fora between September 2024 and January 2025 in Taipei, Tokyo, Washington and Brussels. This has facilitated valuable dialogue and insights from diverse perspectives. These discussions have not only informed the analysis but also highlighted the interconnectedness of economic interests and strategic considerations in shaping EU member states’ evolving positions on Taiwan.

## CHAPTER ONE – CONTEXTUALISING EU-TAIWAN RELATIONS

The EU's approach to Taiwan remains significantly influenced by its relationship with the PRC, and the EU's perception of the PRC has substantially evolved in the past years. Defined as a partner, competitor and rival by the [2019 EU Strategic Outlook on China](#), the EU's views of China have changed since China's growing aggressive behaviour in the technology realm (e.g. the [5G toolbox](#)), in diplomatic and human rights issues (e.g. [the repression of Hong Kong](#) and [the Uyghurs](#) and ["wolf warrior" diplomacy](#)) and after its [instrumentalisation of medical supplies during the Covid-19 pandemic](#). The PRC's support for the Russian war against Ukraine, not only in terms of declaratory statements, but also with [actual material contributions](#), has further epitomised this shift.

Even though the [EU's views of China have deteriorated in recent years](#), the EU has maintained its "One China Policy" and recognises the PRC as the sole legal government of China. Nevertheless, the positive image of Taiwan has been growing in the EU and Taiwan Strait issues have gained a more prominent position in EU debates, evolving from a mainly value-based issue to one centred on economic security based on the need to preserve and secure global value chains.

Taiwan's values resonate strongly with those of the EU. As a consolidated democracy, it upholds human rights and demonstrates significant progress in respecting fundamental freedoms. In a region facing challenges in these areas, Taiwan has distinguished itself as a firm advocate for democratic principles and the rules-based international order. Additionally, Taiwan plays a leading role in critical sectors like semiconductors, which have become pivotal to the EU's emerging approach to economic security. The EU's response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, coupled with the recognition of the need to reduce strategic dependencies, has placed Taiwan at the forefront of economic security discussions.

Taiwan remains a key element of the US security architecture in the Indo-Pacific. It is, in fact, an important component of the ["first island chain"](#), which should ensure strategic maritime containment in the event of a crisis in the Indo-Pacific region. Because of that, the protracted Russian war against Ukraine has heightened strategic concerns in Europe about the reliability of US engagement on the continent in the event of simultaneous conflicts in the two regions.



Even though a second Trump administration has framed Taiwan as '[important, but not existential](#)' to the US security architecture in the Indo-Pacific, it remains highly probable that, in the event of a crisis in the Taiwan Strait, the US would need to prioritise the Indo-Pacific rather than Europe. All of these considerations are making Europe more aware of the strategic importance of Taiwan for Europe itself, and the need to preserve the status quo in the Strait, despite China's growing assertiveness, in order to avoid a complete US shift.

Despite the common perception that Europe is often divided on foreign policy issues, it has demonstrated remarkable unity on the Taiwan issue, particularly through the adoption of joint documents and declarations by EU institutions. For example, the EU's [2021 "Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific"](#) explicitly referred to Taiwan and recognised that tensions in the Taiwan Strait may directly impact European security and prosperity. The European Parliament and several EU leaders have been recently quite vocal about the need to actively preserve the status quo in the Taiwan Strait, with the EU's [former High Representative / Vice-President \(HR/VP\) Josep Borrell even suggesting](#) that European navies should regularly patrol the Taiwan Strait to show Europe's commitment to freedom of navigation. To the accusation of the EU being divided over Taiwan, especially after French President Emmanuel Macron's 2023 [interview](#), the European Council responded by including in its 2023 Conclusions on China that EU member states oppose any unilateral attempts to change the status quo in the Taiwan Strait by force or coercion. This position was further reinforced in the EU's 2025 "[Joint White Paper for European Defence Readiness 2030](#)". To show commitment beyond declaratory statements, [Germany recently sent its frigate Baden-Württemberg to cross the Taiwan Strait](#) in order to restate its commitment to freedom of navigation. [Germany has followed France and the Netherlands in conducting FONOPs through the Taiwan Strait](#), which China claims as internal waters, but which [are in fact considered international waters](#).

The debate in Brussels is indeed gradually evolving to encompass all three critical dimensions – democratic values, economic interests and strategic considerations – when addressing the EU's stance on Taiwan. However, debates within individual European capitals are progressing at different speeds, with some prioritising certain aspects over others. This divergence reflects unique national interests and political contexts, as well as historical ties with the PRC, which contribute to shaping each member state's perspective.

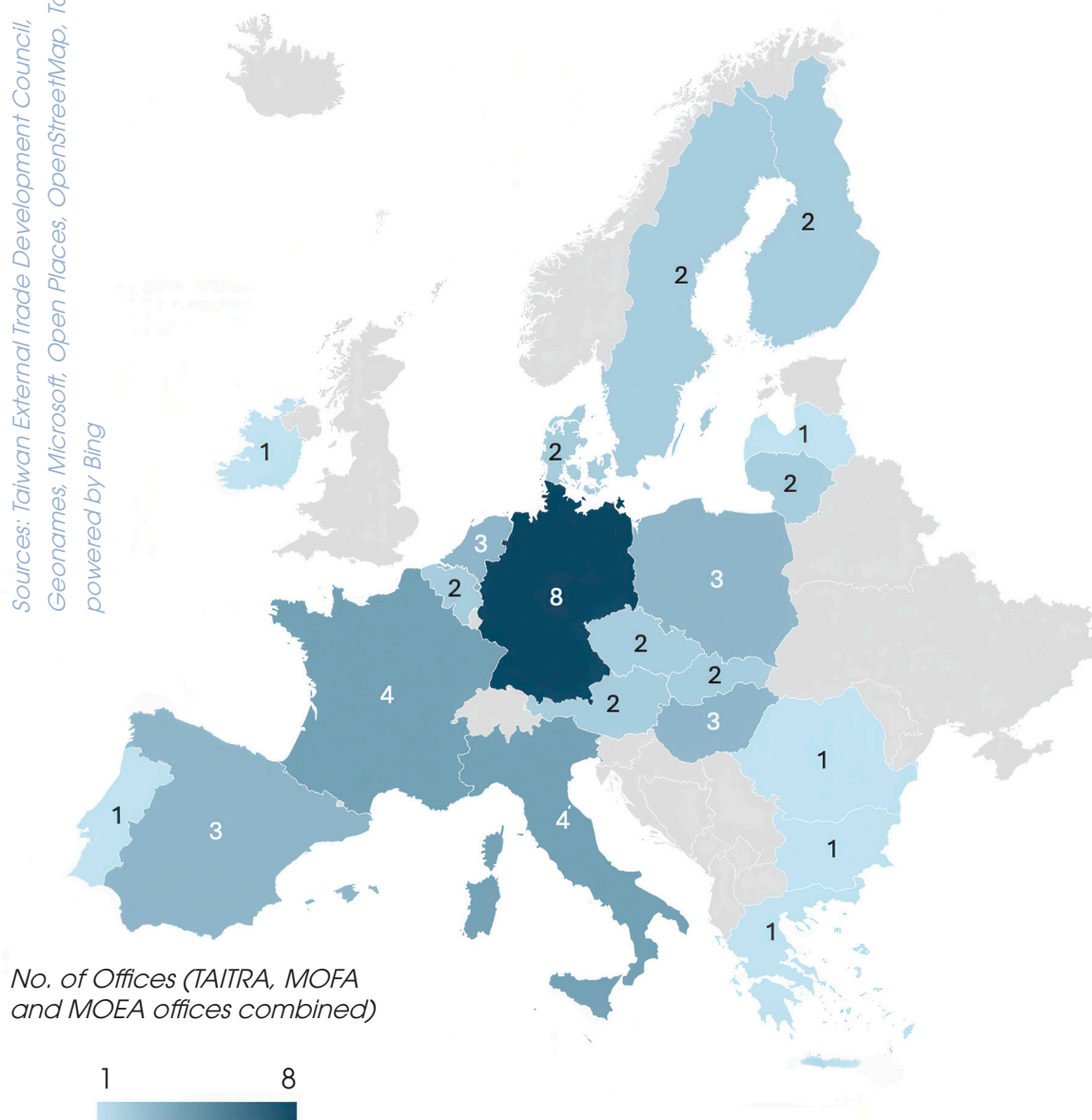
These variations are particularly significant given the EU's reliance on unanimity in foreign policy decision-making, where the agreement of all 27 member states is required to take collective action. As such, joint initiatives on Taiwan always require consensus, making each member state's position equally critical. This also underscores a potential vulnerability: the possibility of the PRC exploiting these differences to create or amplify existing divisions within the EU. By leveraging diplomatic, economic or political tools to influence individual member states, the PRC could aim to weaken European unity on Taiwan-related issues. Understanding the EU member states' individual positions on Taiwan is essential to anticipate and counteract any efforts to divide the EU, and thus ensure a cohesive and strategic approach moving forward.

On this, if the US encourages European support in signalling to China that any attempt to unilaterally change the status quo with Taiwan would trigger a coordinated diplomatic and economic response, Beijing's primary objective in Europe with regard to Taiwan is to limit Taiwan-related discussions in Brussels and, most importantly, in EU member states. Beijing's main argument is that the EU's engagement with Taiwan is contrary to its "One China Policy", omitting the difference with Beijing's own "One China Principle". In the first case, the EU [recognises the government of the PRC as the sole legal government of China](#), but maintains the liberty of establishing economic and diplomatic ties with Taipei, even without formal diplomatic recognition. In the second case, the EU never adhered to the "One China Principle" promoted by Beijing, which indeed entailed that there is only one China and that Taiwan is an "inalienable" part of it. According to the "One China Principle", countries should refrain from having relations with Taiwan. When looking at EU member states, it is noteworthy that they take [different positions on their interpretation of the EU's overall "One China Policy"](#).

**Map 1 - Taiwan's network of representative offices**

*Note: This map combines offices of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), Ministry of Economic Affairs (MOEA) and the Taiwan External Trade Development Council (TAITRA)*

*Sources: Taiwan External Trade Development Council, Geonames, Microsoft, Open Places, OpenStreetMap, TomTom, powered by Bing*



These nuances are often difficult to capture, as they are not always explicitly reflected in official documents or public policies. Many EU member states lack updated national security strategies, and only a few have developed comprehensive strategies specifically addressing the Indo-Pacific region. This gap in formalised approaches makes it challenging to fully understand and assess their evolving positions on Taiwan. In addition, not all EU member states host Taipei representative offices (see Map 1). This limits Taiwan's ability to directly engage with these countries and effectively counter Beijing's narratives about the EU's role and intentions with Taiwan. Without consistent diplomatic representation, Taiwan faces additional obstacles in fostering relationships, promoting accurate messaging and building support for its values and strategic interests within Europe.

Other works have recently attempted to capture these dynamics (see the [Lowy Institute \(2025\) report](#)) by relying on Joint Declarations between each state and China, which allows for an assessment of their positions with regard to the “One China Policy” spectrum. However, this In-Depth Paper takes a different approach. It builds on a comprehensive analysis of EU member states’ positions across several issues relevant to their Taiwan policy and, inescapably, their “One China Policy”. This In-Depth Paper considers all EU member states comprehensively based on four key dimensions, and the mechanisms that shape their relationship. According to this methodology, there are cases like Slovakia that, while their definition of the “One China Policy” may not have changed in the country’s documents, a shift in government may have implied a shift in the implementation of the “One China Policy”; from one towards the pro-China camp, as is the case with Slovakia, or the pro-US camp, as is the case with Lithuania.

Finally, the political landscape in Europe and the US adds another layer of unpredictability to the EU member states’ positions towards the Indo-Pacific region, particularly on issues concerning the Taiwan Strait. Recent elections and political uncertainty in the US and in key EU countries that have traditionally shaped the bloc’s foreign policy discussions in Brussels could lead to shifts in priorities or approaches, potentially impacting the EU’s ability to maintain a unified stance.

## CHAPTER TWO – KEY DIMENSIONS OF EU-TAIWAN RELATIONS

### **Democratic values: Taiwan as a democratic partner**

Taiwan’s status as a modern, liberal democracy that upholds the rule of law and human rights is frequently emphasised in EU discourses. It reinforces Taiwan’s importance in the Indo-Pacific and highlights shared values with EU member states, creating a connection that resonates with the European public. This narrative appears in parliamentary resolutions and speeches across Europe, where Taiwan’s democratic status is widely praised, particularly in contrast to the PRC’s authoritarian nature. In the broader context of US-China rivalry, Taiwan is thus often framed as a symbol of democracy against authoritarianism. The fate of Hong Kong – whose autonomy and democracy were significantly undermined by the PRC’s [2019 National Security Law](#) – has reinforced fears that a Chinese takeover of Taiwan would end its democracy and threaten its free market economic ecosystem.

Such concern is particularly strong in European countries with histories of communist rule and authoritarian pressure.

Taiwan's commitment to democratic values has also [reinforced European support for its participation](#) in international organisations like the World Health Organisation (WHO), the World Health Assembly (WHA) or the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). Such calls have gained prominence as authoritarian powers, often referred to as the "axis of evil" (Russia, China, Iran and North Korea), seek to challenge global norms. Russia's invasion of Ukraine and its ["no-limits friendship" with China](#) have further heightened these concerns.

While the EU's engagement with Taiwan is driven primarily by economic and technological interests, most member states value Taiwan's allegiance to democratic values and its status as a partner to protect such values at the global level, especially as the global multilateral regime is increasingly questioned by non-democratic powers. Considering this, there exist limited joint initiatives to address the FIMI challenge affecting both Taiwan and Europe. Such initiatives include academic exchanges between Latvia and Taiwan, cooperation between Estonia and Taiwan, dialogues between Germany and Indo-Pacific partners or Lithuania's hosting of the [first Global Cooperation and Training Framework \(GCTF\) workshop](#) focused on combatting FIMI, as well as through the European Commission's Service for Foreign Policy Instruments. While democratic values serve as a useful narrative for garnering public support in Europe for Taiwan, and some [cooperation on human rights](#) and [democracy-related issues](#) exists between the EU and Taiwan, Taiwan's role in global supply chains and technological innovation remains the key factor shaping European engagement.

## **Territorial integrity: perspectives on Taiwan's status**

All EU member states strongly oppose any unilateral changes to the Taiwan Strait status quo. This includes both a military takeover by China against the will of the Taiwanese people and a formal declaration of independence by Taiwan. While these represent two extremes, the EU and its member states have also condemned [China's "salami slicing" tactics](#) and [grey-zone activities](#), which gradually erode Taiwan's autonomy. Tensions escalated after [Nancy Pelosi's 2022 visit to Taiwan](#) and have continued with frequent military incursions and exercises near Taiwan's maritime territory. In 2024, China launched [near-daily record incursions](#) into Taiwan's air defence identification zone (ADIZ), further destabilising the region.

Beyond these broad concerns, individual member states' positions are shaped by their own experiences with territorial disputes and secessionist movements. Some countries, such as Latvia and Lithuania, view Taiwan's situation sympathetically due to their histories of occupation and struggles for independence. Their support for Taiwan is rooted in strong beliefs in self-determination and resistance to external aggression.

Although the definition and implementation of EU member states' policy over Taiwan depends on a complex set of interests, most prominently their relationship with China, concerns over separatism among several EU states remain a background factor in domestic politics, such as Spain's or Romania's. In some cases, political parties with separatist leanings have been among the most vocal supporters of Taiwan, using it as a symbol to advance broader political narratives around self-determination. Examples include Italy's [Northern League](#) and Belgium's [New Flemish Alliance](#) (N-VA), both of which have expressed strong support for Taiwan. This dynamic creates an additional layer of caution among EU governments, wary that endorsing Taiwan too openly could inadvertently legitimise separatist movements at home or politicise the Taiwan question within their national debates.

## **Economic security: Taiwan's role in strategic supply chains, trade and investment**

For most EU member states, economic and technological cooperation is the primary driver of engagement with Taiwan. The island country's central role in global supply chains and leadership in key sectors [like semiconductors](#) make it a valuable partner for Europe's economic future. Many countries seek to strengthen bilateral cooperation with Taiwan to secure supply chains, develop strategic industries and enhance their global economic standing. Irish parliamentarians have even promoted the concept of "[democratic supply chains](#)", advocating stronger trade ties among democracies to counter authoritarian influence.

Semiconductors are the top priority, especially after [TSMC's investment in Dresden](#), Germany. Countries like Czechia and Poland hope to benefit from spill-over effects and seek joint investments with Taiwan. Other sectors of interest include laser technology, smart cities, digital technologies, electric vehicles (EVs), renewable energy, sustainable industries, space industries, artificial intelligence (AI), financial technology, biotechnology and pharmaceuticals.



Despite these ambitions, most EU supply chains, except for the Netherlands, remain more dependent on China than Taiwan. However, Taiwan is actively working to expand its economic footprint in Europe, leveraging regional investment funds and cooperation initiatives to attract investment and strengthen Europe's technological capabilities.

Investment relations with Taiwan vary across the EU, although the bilateral investment ties between the EU and Taiwan have always been strong, with [the EU being the largest Foreign Direct Investment \(FDI\) source in Taiwan](#). Some countries such as Germany, Hungary, Italy, Czechia and Sweden, have capitalised on Taiwan's growing interest in Europe while maintaining strong economic ties with China. Czechia, for example, has secured the establishment of [Taiwan's export credit agency \(Eximbank\)](#), [Taiwan's Cooperative Bank](#) and [Taiwan Capital's CEE venture fund](#). Others, like Cyprus and Greece, strictly adhere to the "One China Policy" and treat trade and investment with Taiwan and China as a zero-sum game, limiting their engagement with the former. Taiwan's network of representative offices (see map 1), which facilitate trade and investment, is thus unevenly distributed across Europe, creating imbalances in economic exchanges.

To formalise trade ties, EU member states and Taiwan rely on sectoral memoranda, bilateral conferences and high-level dialogues. One of the most significant agreements is the dual taxation and tax evasion treaty signed between Taiwan and [thirteen EU member states](#). Negotiating this required creative legal solutions to avoid implying recognition of Taiwanese sovereignty, while still boosting trade.

Some member states have very specific trade priorities with Taiwan. Poland, for instance, attaches importance to agricultural exports, while Portugal emphasises tourism cooperation. The Netherlands, for its part, takes a security-driven approach, recognising that disruptions in Taiwan's supply chains, particularly in semiconductors, could have severe consequences for critical industries in both the Netherlands and the EU, more broadly. Yet, a pan-European approach through some form of economic partnership, Free Trade Agreement (FTA) or investment agreement has so far not been pursued by the European Commission, due to opposition from several member states, including Hungary and Cyprus. This implies that the trade relationship between the EU and Taiwan lacks a structured institutional framework. Instead, it relies on ad hoc cooperation between Taiwan and EU member states, which means that it currently underperforms when it comes to both trade and investment.

Nonetheless, as mentioned before, both the EU and Taiwan consider their economic relations as being of high importance, as demonstrated by their elevation of their yearly [Trade and Investment Dialogue](#) from “Consultation” to “Dialogue” in 2022, as a way to institutionalise their economic exchanges in the absence of a formal agreement.

## **Strategic considerations: the impact of Russia’s war on Ukraine**

China’s support for Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has influenced the foreign policy strategies of most EU member states, shaping their positions on Taiwan. Many policymakers see Taiwan’s role in global supply chains as critical, fearing that a conflict in the Taiwan Strait could have devastating economic consequences. The war in Ukraine has reinforced the importance of standing up for a rules-based order, and initially brought EU member states closer to the US on security issues, renewing support for NATO and EU unity. Yet, since President Trump took office in January 2025, a shift in US [tariff policy](#), [his proposal to end the war in Ukraine](#) and the [US retreat from the liberal multilateral order towards isolationism](#), many EU member states question the resilience of the transatlantic relationship. This leads them to [re-double their efforts for strategic autonomy to continue supporting Ukraine](#), and potentially, [re-consider their need to cooperate with China to face the US’ tariffs](#) and the consequences of its economic policy over Europe.

Taiwan’s profile in Europe has also risen due to its humanitarian efforts. Taipei collaborated with EU member states near Ukraine to provide [financial aid and support for Ukrainian refugees](#). Meanwhile, the war has heightened European concerns about Chinese revisionism. Many now see China as a destabilising actor whose belligerence in its own region could have global repercussions. As a result, EU member states have become more cautious in their ties with Beijing, citing security concerns over its actions in the South China Sea, the Taiwan Strait and its alignment with Russia.

The war in Ukraine has also reinforced discussions about EU strategic autonomy, pushing member states to adapt to shifting geopolitical realities. After nearly three decades of limited focus, Taiwan has returned to the foreign policy agenda of many EU member state governments, like Belgium, Czechia, Estonia, Germany or Latvia. This renewed attention is reflected in national security strategies and official statements, with several countries becoming more vocal about the need for peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait.

## CHAPTER THREE – MECHANISMS OF EU-TAIWAN ENGAGEMENT

### Taiwan in national security documents

Over the past decade, most EU member states have avoided explicitly mentioning Taiwan in their national security strategies or documents. Instead, they refer to broader risks to the international order and stability in the Indo-Pacific. China, however, is increasingly framed as a “systemic rival” due to its assertiveness in the South China Sea and the wider Indo-Pacific region, as well as its advancements in emerging disruptive technologies, foreign interference and cognitive warfare.

Many EU countries view the US-China rivalry as a major source of global instability. The intensifying competition between Washington and Beijing is widening geopolitical divisions, threatening multilateral organisations like the UN, undermining international law and leading to a shift in Washington’s strategic focus away from Europe and towards East Asia. This highlights the need for a more cohesive EU stance and a stronger push for strategic autonomy to navigate economic and political disruptions caused by the erosion of the rules-based global order. As a response, national strategies and documents emphasise the importance of de-risking in critical sectors to enhance economic and technological resilience at both the EU and national levels.

A growing number of EU member states are publishing documents highlighting their priorities in engaging with the Indo-Pacific region. France, the Netherlands and Germany led this trend, followed by Czechia, Ireland, Lithuania and Sweden. Italy and Poland are expected to release their own documents in 2025. While the initial ones from France, the Netherlands and Germany did not mention Taiwan, [France’s 2022 revision](#) identified China’s actions in the Taiwan Strait as a key global flashpoint. Italian parliamentary hearings on the new document have also stressed Taiwan’s role in the regional stability of the Indo-Pacific. [Lithuania’s 2023 Indo-Pacific strategy](#) referenced Taiwan more than any other EU country, portraying the island country as a key partner. Across these documents, Taiwan is often seen as a regional partner in areas such as foreign interference, societal resilience, critical infrastructure security, cybersecurity and strategic communication.

In contrast, some EU member states focus primarily on threats in their immediate neighbourhood, with Russia often seen as the top security concern. This includes countries like Bulgaria, Poland or Estonia. However, perspectives are evolving.

Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Taiwan has gained importance in Estonia's political agenda. [Poland's 2020 National Security Strategy](#) explicitly identified Russia's "neo-imperialist policy" as the greatest threat. However, the updated version (currently in development) also recognises a potential conflict over Taiwan as a security risk, aligning Poland with the broader European view that sees regional and global security as increasingly interconnected.

## Parliamentary and unofficial diplomacy

The lack of formal diplomatic relations between EU member states and Taiwan, due to the "One China Policy", forces many European public officials to engage with Taiwan through unofficial channels. The main avenue for this is parliamentary diplomacy. Most national parliaments including Austria, Belgium, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland and Sweden, have exchanged delegations with Taiwan's Legislative Yuan. They have also passed resolutions supporting Taiwan's participation in international organisations, highlighting its value as a democratic partner, and the importance of stability in the Taiwan Strait. [Subnational diplomacy](#) has also played a key role in Taiwan-Europe relations. However, some EU member states have been more hesitant. Croatia shows little interest in Taiwan in its domestic politics. Greece and Cyprus, seeking China's support in the UN Security Council, also avoid close engagement with Taiwan.

The [Formosa Club](#) has played a key role in promoting parliamentary diplomacy in Europe, connecting pro-Taiwan parliamentarians across the EU and the European Parliament. Alongside the club, some EU member states engage in declaratory diplomacy, issuing statements on East Asian security. Many prefer to do so collectively, through the G7 or the European Council, to avoid direct retaliation from China. In general, EU member states align their Taiwan policies with the broader EU stance, balancing national interests with European unity. Some EU member states have also signed official agreements with Taiwan outside the trade realm. [Denmark](#), [Germany](#), [Poland](#) and [Slovakia](#) have signed judicial cooperation agreements.

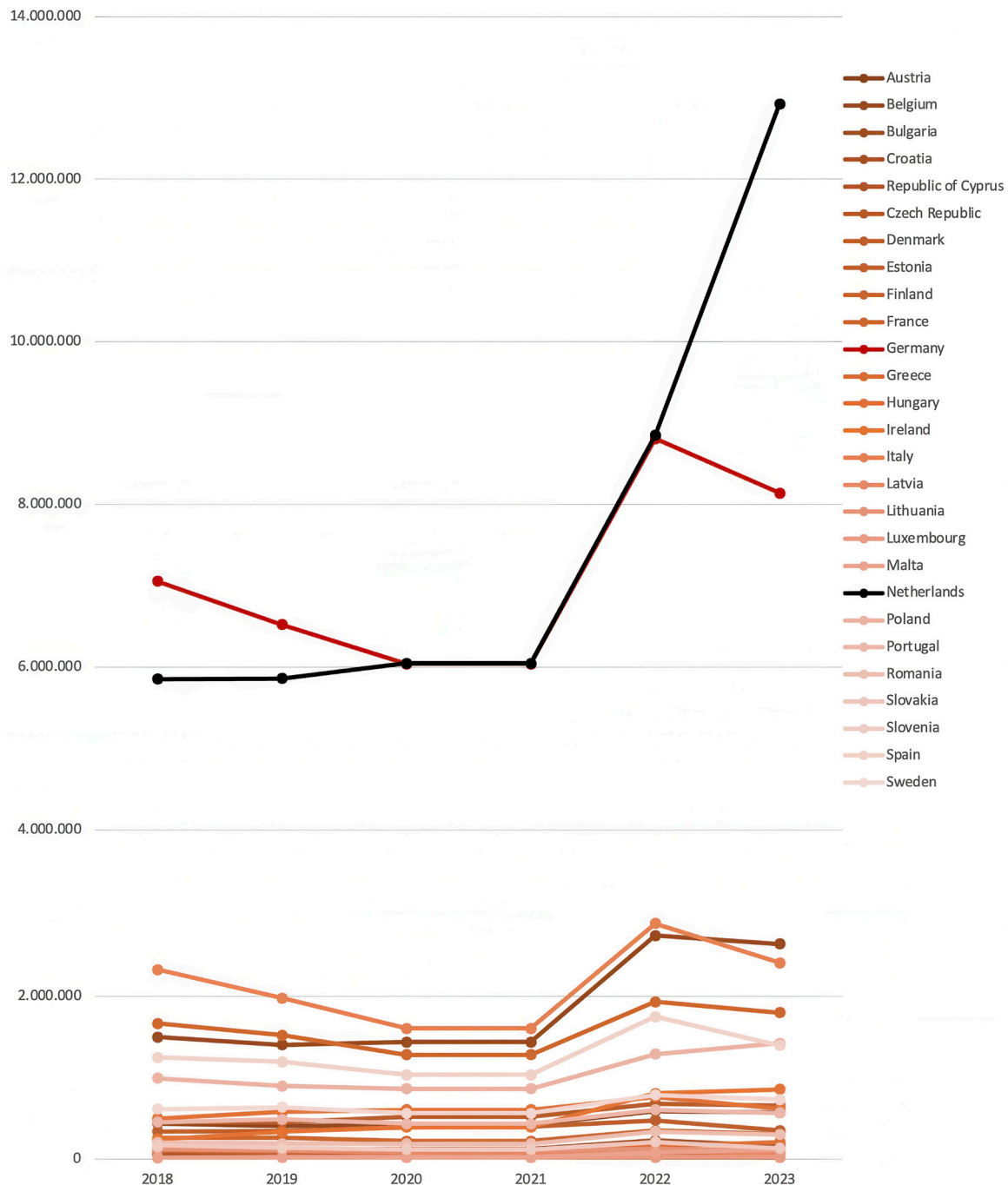
Beyond diplomatic exchanges, cultural and educational exchanges have grown. Several member states have launched mobility programmes, including Czechia, Finland and Ireland, and working holiday programmes, such as that of [Luxembourg's](#) and 11 other member states. In general, engagement remains more complex with those countries that do not host Taipei offices or do not have representative offices in Taiwan.

## CHAPTER FOUR – EU-TAIWAN TRADE AND ECONOMIC RELATIONS

A comprehensive overview of the trade relationship between EU member states, China and Taiwan reveals several key points. First, the volume of exports and imports between EU countries and China is generally about 10 times higher than with Taiwan. In terms of exports, the Netherlands and Germany dominate the export market to both China and Taiwan. For Taiwan, a downward trend prevailed until 2021, when countries increased exports to recover from the pandemic's economic impact – see Figure 1. Since then, exports have generally risen, with a slight slowdown between 2022 and 2023. The Netherlands is an exception, as its exports to Taiwan, particularly semiconductors, have continued to rise sharply.

The situation with China is different – see Figure 2. Exports generally followed an upward trend until 2021, with no significant shock due to the pandemic. However, there has been a slowdown and partial decline since then. Member states can be grouped into three categories: “export leaders” (e.g. Germany and the Netherlands), “traders” (e.g. Belgium, France, Italy, Poland and Spain) and “laggards” (the rest), whose exports to China are significantly lower. The two export leaders dominate EU's export market to China, with double the amount of good and services being traded – between US\$70 billion and US\$100 billion – compared to the second group. The “traders” have a significant trade relationship with China – with exports amounting between US\$20 billion and US\$50 billion. The “laggards” have a minor trade relationship with China, with exports amounting to less than US\$20 billion between 2018 and 2023. In terms of imports, Germany is the largest importer, while the Netherlands imports more from Taiwan than from China relative to other EU member states.

**Figure 1 - EU member states' exports to Taiwan (in US\$ thousand) (2018-2023)**



Source: Graph elaborated by the authors based on data from Taiwan's International Trade Administration and the World Bank's World Integrated Trade Solution.

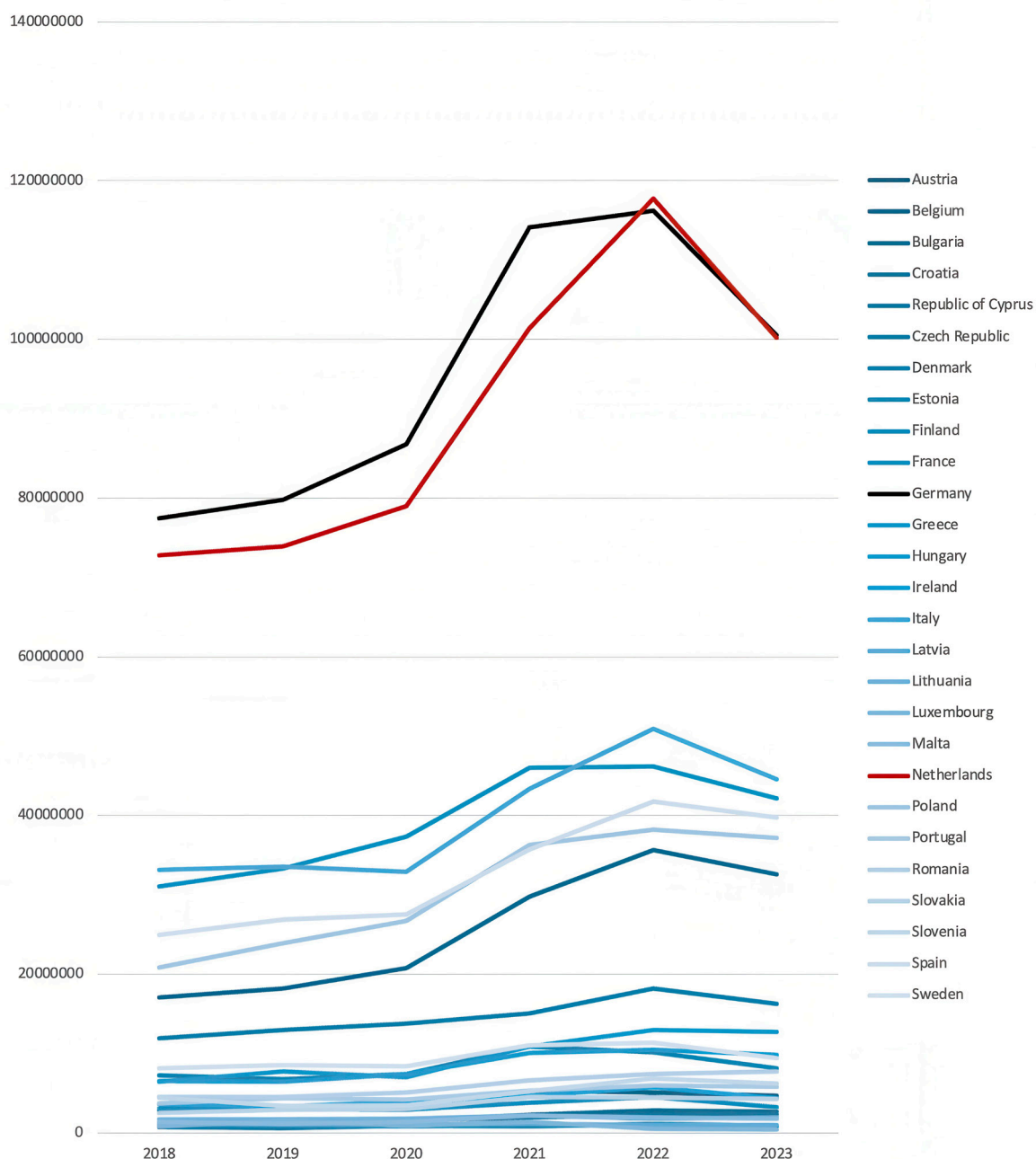
Looking at trade-to-GDP ratios, the Netherlands stands out for having the highest relative importance of trade with Taiwan, while most other member states have ratios below 0.5%. EU member states are more dependent on China, with trade-to-GDP ratios above 2% – except Luxembourg –, generally ranging from 2% to 5%. Historically, the relative importance of trade with Taiwan has increased until 2022, after which it decreased across member states, due to contracting global trade.



Additionally, it is unclear what negative repercussions will emerge in the EU-Taiwan economic relationship as a result of the EU's de-risking and economic security strategies.

In summary, dependence on China is concentrated among various member states, while the EU's trade with Taiwan is driven primarily by Germany and the Netherlands, followed by Italy and France. However, an interesting trend is in play: while most EU member states seem to be reducing their economic exposure to China, some are strengthening their trade and economic ties with Taiwan.

**Figure 2 - EU member states' exports to China (in US\$ thousand) (2018-2023)**



Source: Graph elaborated by the authors based on data from the World Bank's World Integrated Trade Solution (until 2022) and from Trading Economics for 2023.

## CHAPTER FIVE – THE TYPOLOGY OF EU MEMBER STATES’ APPROACHES TO TAIWAN WITHIN THE SINO-US RIVALRY

Discussions about European perspectives on Taiwan cannot be separated from the broader context of US-China rivalry and the state of the transatlantic relationship, two structural factors that shape the strategic calculations of EU member states towards Taiwan. As tensions between Washington and Beijing continue to rise, European governments must navigate this complex geopolitical landscape while balancing economic interests, security concerns and political values. When we analyse the positions of individual EU member states on Taiwan within this rivalry, according to the dimensions and mechanism previously outlined, we identify three distinct approaches: those that adopt a stance of neutrality or pragmatism (“the Balancers”), those that align more closely with the US (“the Atlanticists”) and those that lean towards China (“the Sino-Friendly states”). These positions are influenced by historical ties, economic dependencies, security commitments and national and foreign policy priorities.

| Position on US-China rivalry | Member states  |
|------------------------------|--|
| The Balancers                | Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden |
| The Atlanticists             | Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania and Romania  |
| The Sino-Friendly states     | Croatia, Hungary and Slovakia  |

## ***“The Balancers”***

Balancers distinguish between their political and security alignment with the US – most being NATO members – and their economic ties with China, which they seek to protect and expand through open dialogue. For these EU member states, which form the majority, relations with the US and China are qualitatively different and not to be seen as a zero-sum game. However, this approach becomes increasingly difficult to maintain as US-China competition intensifies and transpires into virtually every issue, including economic policy and Taiwan Strait dynamics. On the issue of Taiwan, for instance, some of the balancers might take a more China-friendly approach, like Greece, or a more pro-Taiwan approach, like the Netherlands, depending on their national interests and political priorities. That said, balancers continue to strive for an approach that reconciles the centrality of security ties with the US with a preservation of economic ties with China – an approach often framed as advancing the EU’s strategic autonomy.

In our analysis, the EU member states engaged in this balancing exercise are Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden. This is not a homogeneous group. In fact, each country applies different balancing and “hedging” strategies, depending on national interests and historical factors. All of the EU’s largest economies belong to this group, which could have significant implications in the event of a Taiwan Strait conflict. In such a contingency, these countries could, for instance, advocate for a more measured response to Chinese aggression – either by resisting stringent sanctions or by opposing direct military support for Taiwan – in an effort to avoid direct involvement in the conflict and mitigate potential economic repercussions.

While the EU’s overall approach to China follows the 2019 Strategic Outlook’s “partner, competitor and rival” framework, balancers often shift politically sensitive issues – such as human rights, Xinjiang or Hong Kong – to the EU level. This allows them to minimise bilateral tensions while still supporting the EU’s normative stance. As a result, a divide often emerges between the EU institutions, particularly the European Commission and the European External Action Service, which take more vocal positions on China, and individual member states, which focus primarily on trade and investment.

***“The Atlanticists”***

Atlanticists have aligned themselves firmly with US interests, positioning themselves as a counterweight to Beijing’s rise and often being vocal against China’s actions in Hong Kong, Xinjiang or its increased militarism in the South China Sea and Taiwan Strait. Their partnership with the US is based on their close security alliance, more than their shared values as liberal democracies or their support for the liberal world order, especially as they have become increasingly aware of the risks associated with critical infrastructure, high technology and maritime security towards China. Thus, those countries have gradually distanced and detached themselves from China, and prioritised their alliance with the United States to ensure the US’ security guarantees to Europe. More often than not, this desire to align with the US has a pervasive impact on their Taiwan policy.

In our analysis, “the Atlanticist” EU member states are Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania and Romania. Just like “the Balancers”, this Atlanticist group is not homogeneous. Some countries have opted for a quieter disengagement from China (e.g. Latvia or Romania), while others (e.g. Czechia or Lithuania) have chosen a more vocal disengagement based on a strong accent on values. This second group have often chosen to support Taiwan more vocally on the global stage.

Compared to “the Balancers”, “the Atlanticists” follow an approach where the “rival” part of the equation in the EU Strategic Outlook prevails over that of “partner” and “competitor”, due to concerns over cyber disruptions, economic coercion, authoritarian expansion and Beijing’s support for Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. As a consequence, they have been willing to engage with Taiwan more actively and openly, trying to push the EU’s position away from the prevailing balancing approach towards a more principled one.

### ***“The Sino-Friendly states”***

The Sino-Friendly countries are those that align more closely with China. Within the EU, they are often perceived as obstructionist or even as “Trojan horses” in the European Council, accused of undermining European unity on China policy.

Our analysis identifies Croatia, Hungary and Slovakia as Sino-Friendly states. Croatia and Hungary have publicly endorsed China’s “One China Principle”, which differs from the EU’s official stance, while Fico’s government in Slovakia has pivoted towards China, [elevating their ties to a “strategic partnership”](#) and often going against the EU line, as exemplified by its participation to the 80th anniversary of the end of World War II in Moscow and [its parallel meeting with Xi Jinping there](#). [Hungary, in particular, has deepened its ties with Beijing](#) alongside its growing hostility toward EU institutions. As a result, China enjoys high visibility and a largely positive image in Hungary’s domestic discourse. Croatia, by contrast, has historically prioritised relations with China in the context of cross-strait issues but without actively disrupting the broader US-China-EU balance. Even when tensions increase between the US and China, Croatia has carefully avoided publicly taking sides, advocating for global rules and Europe’s engagement with China, with whom it does not want to risk its bilateral relations. Overall, Croatia aims to protect its relations with China without actively opposing EU priorities.

## CONCLUSIONS

Despite concerns that the new US administration might push Europe closer to China, EU-Taiwan relations are unlikely to undergo a radical shift in the near future, as European policy towards Taiwan remains shaped by long-standing structural and political considerations, informed by the state of the US-China rivalry, the Covid-19 pandemic and Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Most EU member states will maintain a pragmatic approach, gradually aligning with the EU's strategic autonomy and de-risking policies while balancing their relations with China and Taiwan.

However, several unpredictable internal and external factors could drive significant changes. First, forthcoming national elections across the EU in the next two years could alter individual countries' positions, especially where there is no cross-party consensus on Taiwan. Second, countries revising key national security or Indo-Pacific strategies could be forced to clarify their stance on Taiwan, particularly as China grows more assertive. Third, specific national circumstances may lead some states to adjust their China policy. Latvia, for instance, is campaigning for a non-permanent UN Security Council seat for 2026–2027 and may seek to avoid antagonising China. Romania could rethink its position due to concerns over Chinese interference, particularly through [TikTok's role in its recent political crisis](#). Meanwhile, national industries may also influence policy, such as ASML in the Netherlands and Saab in Sweden, both of which have strategic interests linked to Taiwan.

Looking at the external dimension, China's role in the Ukraine war remains a critical factor. If Beijing deepens its support for Russia, more EU states may reassess their ties with China and prioritise engagement with Taiwan. Finally, and possibly the most consequential element, is the position and narrative that the second Trump presidency will adopt on Taiwan and, linked to that, the US administration's expectations regarding the European engagement in the Indo-Pacific region.



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