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EP POLICY TOWARDS TAIWAN IN 2002-2003:

SOME INSPIRATION FOR THE EMERGING EU *COMMON* CHINA POLICY

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1. Introduction

In 2002-2003, the European Parliament (EP) adopted five resolutions concerning Taiwan. Respectively on March 14, 2002 and May 15, 2003, it adopted two resolutions that called on the World Health Assembly to grant observer status to Taiwan.² On April 11, 2002, the EP adopted the “EU Strategy towards China” (hereafter the “China Resolution”),³ of which one chapter focuses on the Taiwan issue. On September 5 of the same year, the resolution on Europe-Asia Partnerships was adopted (hereafter the “ASEM Resolution”),⁴ in which the EP called for Taiwan’s participation in the ASEM. In its resolution adopted on December 18, 2003, the EP insisted that “it is the wrong time, in view of Chinese threats against Taiwan, to open the way to lifting [of] the European arms embargo [against the PRC].”⁵ In this essay, I intend to clarify EP policy towards Taiwan based upon a textual analysis of these resolutions and a series of on-line surveys of twenty-five members of EP (MEPs) (see Appendix). It is argued that a tripartite consisting of a commitment to “one-China”, insistence upon a peaceful resolution and respect for the people’s will in Taiwan is constituting EP basic doctrine in EU relations with Taiwan. Based upon this tripartite doctrine, the EP urges Beijing and Taipei to establish permanent dialogue to reach reconciliation and advocates Taiwan’s participation in the ASEM. In conclusion, I will argue, such a doctrine and policy distinguishes the EP from the Council, Commission and governments of member states on the Taiwan issue, and, paradoxically, echoes well the US strategy in the Taiwan Straits since the mid-1990s.

2. The EP’s tripartite doctrine

The “EU Strategy towards China” adopted in April 2002 consists of fifty paragraphs and five sections on the subjects of introduction, trade, Taiwan, human rights and Tibet. Taiwan is covered from paragraph 26 to paragraph 34. At the very beginning, the EP clarifies without any ambiguity the fundamental doctrines on the issue of Taiwan (paragraph 26).

¹ Las opiniones expresadas en estos artículos son propias de sus autores. Estos artículos no reflejan necesariamente la opinión de UNISCI. The views expressed in these articles are those of the authors. These articles do not necessarily reflect the views of UNISCI

² European Parliament Resolution on Observer Status for Taiwan at the May 2002 Annual Meeting of the World Health Assembly (WHA) in Geneva, P5_TAPROV(2002)0130; European Parliament Resolution on Taiwan (56th World Health Assembly), P5_TA(2003)0224.

³ EU Strategy towards China, European Parliament Resolution on the Commission Communication to the Council and the European Parliament on a EU Strategy towards China: Implementation of the 1998 Communication and future steps for a more effective EU policy (COM(2001) 265-C5-0098/2001- 2001/2045 (COS)), PA_TA(2002)0179.

⁴ Europe-Asia Partnerships, European Parliament resolution on the Commission Communication on Europe and Asia: A Strategic Framework for Enhanced Partnerships (COM(2001) 469 – C5-0255/2002 –2002/2120(COS)), P5_TAPROV(2002)0408.

⁵ European Parliament Resolution on Arms Sales to China, P5_TA-PROV(2003)0599.



“[T]he EU’ adherence to the one-China policy is directly linked to its commitment to a peaceful resolution of the dispute through negotiations, dialogue and confidence-building measures without any threat of force, and therefore [the EP] cannot accept that China reserves the right to use military force in its dispute with Taiwan.”

For the first time, an institution of the EU correlated its adherence to “one-China” with a peaceful resolution to the conflict between the PRC and Taiwan. In the “ASEM Resolution”, the EP further argued that the peace in the Taiwan Straits was indispensable to the “political and economic stability in the region [of Asia]” (paragraph 37). However, all the members did not agree on the terms of paragraph 26 of the “China Resolution”, which won only 264 votes and with 198 votes cast against it.⁶ This is the only article in the Taiwan section of this resolution that calls for a collective vote. The left wing, led by PSE and GUE/NGL, seemed to oppose the denial of Chinese resort to force in its dispute with Taiwan, which is, they argued, well illustrated by the EP advocacy of a peaceful resolution. It is also argued that an explicit objection would irritate Beijing and complicate the EU’s role in this region. A compromise was then reached. The reference to “President Jiang Zemin’s recent remarks” used by Vasco Graça Moura in his draft report at the Committee on Foreign Affairs was deleted.⁷ The EP nonetheless emphasized that “the will and approval of the 23 million people in Taiwan must be respected and accounted for in light of a hopefully peaceful solution between two parties” (paragraph 31). A tripartite consisting of a commitment to “one-China”, insistence upon a peaceful resolution and respect for the people’s will in Taiwan now constitutes the EP basic doctrine on the issue of Taiwan.

The EP does not, however, categorically define its meaning of “one-China”. Nor has it explained its commitment to the so-called peaceful resolution in the Taiwan Straits. Among the twelve MEPs that have expressed their opinions on this subject in on-line interviews conducted between September and December 2002, a majority accepts that Taiwan is part of China as a whole or part of the PRC. However, some put into doubt the very basis of EU’s “one-China” idea. “The question of Taiwan,” said Bill Newton Bunn, a British MEP, “depends on the wishes of the Taiwanese alone – the right of self-determination as guaranteed by the United Nations.” “For me,” he added, “the ‘One China Policy’ is a Beijing expression.”⁸ Ari Vatanen, a Finnish MEP, also accepts that Taiwanese have full “rights of self-determination”.⁹ Andria Generoso, an Italian MEP, even interprets “One-China” as the “Republic of China”, of which Taiwan is a part.¹⁰ The Swedish group of PSE even replies collectively that so called “One-China” has nothing to do with Chinese territorial integrity.¹¹ Thus, while the MEPs seem deeply divided in the interpretation of EU’s “One-China”, no solution shall be implemented by any form of force. In the viewpoints of those MEPs, absolute pacifism shall prevail in the Taiwan Straits. Asked if the PRC should be denied the resort to force in its dispute with Taiwan, twenty-two of those twenty-five MEPs agreed that any resort to force was unacceptable. Only Roger Helmer, a British MEP of the PPE-DE, added a conditional that “any resort to force is unacceptable provided that Taiwan is not provocative”,¹² while Ari Vatanen and Christa Prets

⁶ Annex I, Results of Votes, EU Strategy towards China.

⁷ Draft Report on the Commission Communication on an EU Strategy towards China: Implementation of the 1998 Communication and Future Steps for a More Effective EU Policy (COM(2001) 265 – C5-.../2001 – 2001/2045(COS)), PROVISIONAL, 2001/2045(COS).

⁸ Interview with Bill Newton Dunn by Email on 19 November 2002.

⁹ Interview with Ari Vatanen by Email on 26 September 2002.

¹⁰ Interview with Andria Generoso by Email on 22 November 2002. The Republic of China, established in Nanjing in 1912 as the legitimate representative of whole China, is still the official title of Taiwan.

¹¹ Interviews with Jan Andersson, Bōran Färm, Ewa Hedkvist, Anneli Hulthén, Hans Karlsson and Maj Britt Theorin by Email on 26 November 2002.

¹² Interview with Roger Helmer by Email on 23 November 2002.



(Austrian MEP) refused to explain their commitment to the peaceful resolution of cross-strait issues in the Taiwan Straits.¹³

3. EP policy towards Taiwan

Based upon this tripartite doctrine, the EP seems to prefer to consolidate the status quo and opposes any action that threatens to worsen the present situation. Thus, it worries about the arms race between Taiwan and the PRC and urges both sides “to de-escalate the arms building-up, and in particular for China to withdraw missiles in the coastal provinces across the Taiwan Straits” (paragraph 17 of the “ASEM Resolution”). The same worry also persuaded the EP in December 2003 that “it is the wrong time, in view of Chinese threats against Taiwan, to open the way to lifting [of] the European arms embargo [against the PRC].” It also stated, however, that the EP welcomes any moves that promote exchange and confidence-building measures between the two sides, and even sides with the PRC in advocating “direct mail services, trade, air and shipping links across the Straits be activated as soon as possible” (paragraph 32 of “China Resolution”), a highly debated issue in Taiwan at present. Moreover, the EP expresses the view that “the future of cross-Straits relations will depend on both sides' willingness to demonstrate flexibility, and on their capacity to be imaginative in proposing steps to resume dialogue” (paragraph 30 of the “China Resolution”). Compared to the rest of the Taiwan section in this resolution, this phrase is easily open to criticism as being embellished language or utopian idealism. Nonetheless, it could be the most sincere will of the EP and the EU as a whole vis-à-vis conflicts between Taiwan and the PRC. It immediately recalls the beginning of European integration in 1950. At that time, the FRG was freshly established one year earlier and its government was a rather autonomous authority than a sovereign government. The French army occupied part of Germany and tried its best to separate Sarreland from the FRG. In particular, the war had ended only five years earlier and Nazi cruelty was still fresh in all Europeans' minds. It was “the willingness to demonstrate flexibility and the capacity to be imaginative” of political leaders in France and Germany that triggered the European integration and general reconciliation, which in turn has consolidated peace in Europe. Well experienced in hostility and reconciliation, Europeans have learned that no conflict can be resolved if the political elite is lacking in the “willingness to demonstrate flexibility” and the “capacity to be imaginative”.

As Taiwan is evidently the weaker player in its bilateral dialogue with the PRC and politically isolated in the international community, the EP advocates the participation of Taiwan in the ASEM and strengthening of bilateral relations between Taiwan and the EU. According to the EP, “the participation of Taiwan in ASEM could be a step forward as to the resumption of a genuine dialogue between Beijing and Taipei with a view to developing cross-Straits relations” (paragraph 28 of the “China Resolution”). It is the first time that the EP has advocated Taiwan's participation in ASEM in public. The EP's policy towards Taiwan's quest for accession to the ASEM is further clarified in its “ASEM Resolution”. In paragraph nine, the EP expresses its view that India and Taiwan should not be excluded from the ASEM. It then urges the Council and Commission to “find ways to associate India and Taiwan in ASEM”. (paragraph 10) However, the EP shows some inconsistency in its denominations of Taiwan in paragraphs nine and ten. In the former, the EP grouped India and Taiwan together as “two democratic countries whose economies are among the most dynamic in Asia.” In the latter, however, the EP deliberately excluded Taiwan from the list of Asian “countries” and treated Taiwan as *sui generes*, then urged the EU to associate “India, other Asian countries and Taiwan in ASEM”. The denomination of Taiwan as a “democratic country” similar to India probably dissatisfied the PSE and GUE/NGL, which tried in vain to amend paragraph nine by 174 votes against 290.¹⁴ However, compared to the “China Resolution” that urges the EU to “enlarge” ASEM to India and accept “participation of Taiwan in ASEM”, the “ASEM Resolution” adopts now a relatively

¹³ Interviews by Email respectively with Ari Vatanen on 30 November 2002, and with Christa Prets on 4 December 2002.

¹⁴ Annex I, Results of Votes, Europe-Asia Partnerships.



retrogressive position on this subject. It uses the term “association” instead of “participation”, though the EP reiterates that the political pillar of the ASEM would support, as its first priority, “political dialogue between PRC and Taiwan on the question of Taiwan” (paragraph 16). This inconsistency corresponds well to the lack of consensus among the MEPs on this issue. All six Swedish Socialists MEPs insist that “a special arrangement should be made for Taiwan in ASEM”.¹⁵ Brigitte Lagenhagen from Germany even suggested that an “associate membership” should be created in order to include Taiwan in the ASEM.¹⁶ Per Gahrton, a Swedish *Vert* MEP, insisted that “Taiwan could be a member in ASEM and certain other organizations in the same way that both Taiwan and Hong-Kong are members in WTO.”¹⁷ Nevertheless, more MEPs argue that Taiwan should be a full member of the ASEM.¹⁸ The assumption that Taiwan’s participation in a multilateral framework shall facilitate the resumption of bilateral dialogue with Beijing seemed to persuade the EP to repeatedly support Taiwan’s quest for participation in the WHO, targeted by Taipei as beachhead of its battle for accession to the UN since 1991.

The EP also adopts a maximalist approach to interpret the non-official bilateral relations between Taiwan and EU as a whole. The EP deplors repeatedly the fact that “the Member States did not grant visas for President Chen Shui-Bian to visit Europe” and urges “the Council and the Member States to honour their commitment to the fundamental rights of freedom to travel and issue visas to the President and all high-ranking officials of Taiwan for private visits to the European Union” (paragraph 31 of the “China Resolution” and paragraph 37 of the “ASEM Resolution”). It also urged “the Commission to fulfill without delay its commitment to open an EU information office in Taipei,” resulting in the creation of an EU trade office in Taipei in the spring of 2003. It calls on the Commission “to initiate the process of negotiation which will lead to an EU-Taiwan free trade agreement” (paragraph 17 of the “ASEM Resolution”). This demand corresponds well to Taipei’s strategy to multiply its free trade agreement (FTA) with other countries to counterbalance the regionalist project initiated by the RPC in November 2001, which excludes Taiwan from the future East Asian integration.

4. Conclusion

Though European integration has evolved from a common market with a CAP into a political entity with quasi-constitutionalized regulatory capacities, the EP plays an obvious secondary role as a consultant body in EU external relations. Foreign policy is still in hands of the Council as well as member states, which intransigently adheres to the “one-China policy”.

“[T]he Commission does, in principle, support Taiwanese effort, and not just in the area under debate [concerning Taiwan’s participation in WHO]; it supports all its efforts to become involved in the work of international agencies and organisations, provided that there are sufficient economic or other relevant grounds for such involvement. However, its involvement must be compatible with the status of Taiwan and the EU one China policy.”¹⁹

In March 1999, in a regulation on the subject of the nationals of third countries inside the EU, the Council qualified Taiwan as a “[t]erritorial entity and authority not recognized by all member

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Interview with Brigitte Langenhangen by Email on 27 November 2002.

¹⁷ Interview with Per Gahrton by Email on 6 November 2002.

¹⁸ Interviews by Email respectively with Piia-Noora Kauppi on 19 September, Graham Watson and Cecilia Malmstrom on 23 September, and Generoso Andria on 8 October 2002.

¹⁹ Franz Fishler (Commission), “Debate of the European Parliament, Sitting of Thursday, 14 March 2002”. <http://www3.europal.eu.int/omk/omnsapir.so/debatsL5?FILE=20020314EN&LANGUE=EN&LEVEL=DOC&NUMINT=4-181>. (10 December 2002)



states.”²⁰ The EP’s friendly attitude towards Taiwan will not change dramatically and immediately the foreign policies of the EU and its Member States. However, as the bureaucracy and democratic deficit have come under severe criticism in Europe, the EU is under great pressure to democratize and be transparent, both of which would contribute to increasing the decision-making power of the EP. The Constitutional Convention and the draft Constitutional Treaty it presented have confirmed this trend. According to historical institutionalism, an institution, often negligible in its founding period, can be transformed into a powerful decision-making center over time.²¹ Its recommendations in the early period could in consequence be implemented as policies later.²² Based upon this deduction, EP resolutions concerning Taiwan require more attention than do other non-binding acts.

According to the textual analysis of the above-mentioned resolutions and the on-line surveys of twenty-five MEPs, the EP has established step by step its own doctrine and policy on the issue of Taiwan (see Figure I). It bases this policy upon the tripartite doctrine composed of its adherence to “One-China,” “a peaceful resolution of conflicts” and “the respect of will and approval of people in Taiwan.” It opposes consequently any resort to force in the Taiwan Straits under any circumstances, calls on both sides to de-escalate arms build-up and resume direct dialogue as soon as possible, and advocates an engagement of the EU in the Taiwan Straits under the ASEM framework. With regard to Taiwan’s diplomatic isolation, the EP seems to satisfy a great deal of Taiwan’s demands. In public, it supports Taiwan’s many active political efforts to become an observer of WHO, participate in the ASEM, negotiate a free trade agreement with the EU, and establish high-level official, or at least officious, exchanges in the guise of private visits of high-ranking ministers or even the President. Such a pro-Taiwan policy distinguishes EP from the Council, Commission and governments of the member states, and paradoxically echoes more and more American policy towards the Taiwan Straits since the mid-1990s.²³ Both policies aim to maintain the status quo. Both intend to deter China’s resort to force on the one hand, and impose upon Taiwan itself the responsibility to resume a political dialogue with the PRC. However, even the structure in the Taiwan Straits imposed by the US and expected by the EP alone cannot create a real reconciliation and produce a durable peace in the region. Therefore, the future of cross-strait relations and the destiny of both sides, according to the EP, “will depend on both sides’ willingness to demonstrate flexibility, and on their capacity to be imaginative in proposing steps to resume dialogue”. The leaders of China and Taiwan may have to learn to be more “flexible” and “imaginative” from their European colleagues.

²⁰ Council Regulation (EC) No. 574/99 of March 1999 determining the third countries whose nationals must be in possession of visas when crossing the external borders of the member states. OJ L No. 72, 18/03/99.

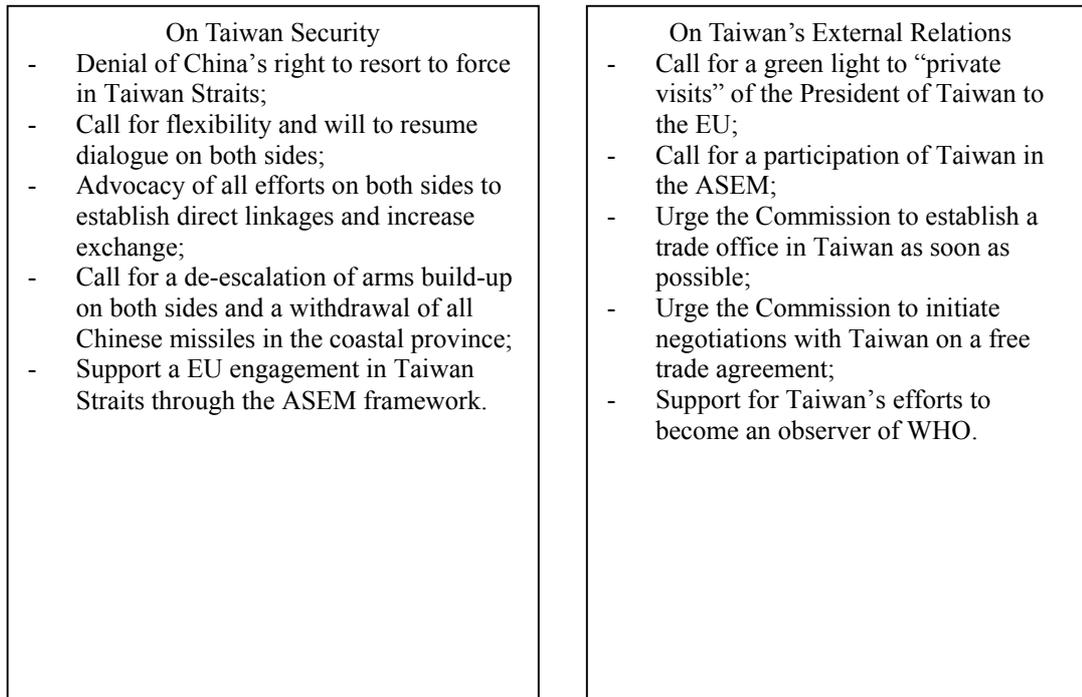
²¹ See Paul Pierson, “The Path to European Integration: A Historical Institutional Analysis”, *Comparative Political Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 2, April 1996, pp. 123-163.

²² See Paul Pierson, “The Path to European Integration: A Historical Institutional Analysis”, *Comparative Political Studies*, Vol. 29 No. 2, April 1996, pp. 123-163.

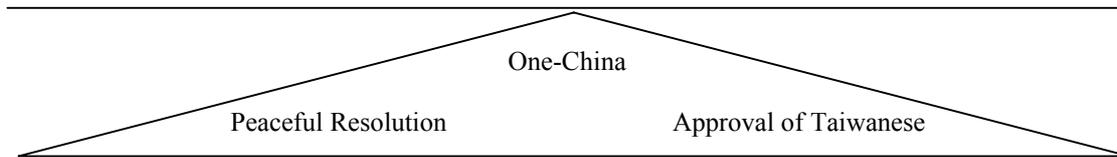
²³ On February 24, 2000, American President Bill Clinton declared that the consent of the people in Taiwan is indispensable to any solution to conflicts in the Taiwan Straits. It is the first time that the American government links the Taiwanese people’s will to the solution of conflicts between the PRC and Taiwan.



Figure 1 EP doctrine and policy on the Taiwan issue



(output of policies)



(Fundamental Doctrines)



Appendix MEPs interviewed by the author between September and December 2002.

Name	Given Name	Sex	Nationality	Party Affiliation	Email
LANGENHAGEN	Brigitte	F	D	PPE-DE	blangenhagen@europarl.eu.int
ANDRIA	Generoso	M	I	PPE-DE	gandria@europarl.eu.int
ROVSING	Christian	M	DK	PPE-DE	crovsing@europarl.eu.int
FERRER	Concepcio	F	E	PPE-DE	cferrer@europarl.eu.int
NEWTON DUNN	Bill	M	UK	PPE-DE	wnewton@europarl.eu.int
GORSEL	Elly	F	NL	ELDR	pplooi@europarl.eu.int
KAUPPI	Piia-Noora	F	FIN	PPE-DE	pkauppi@europarl.eu.int
POOS	Jacques	M	L	PSE	jpoos@europarl.eu.int
WATSON	Graham R.	M	UK	ELDR	euro_office@cix.co.uk
MALMSTRÖM	Cecilia	F	S	ELDR	cmalmstrom@europarl.eu.int
PRETS	Christa	F	A	PSE	cprets@europarl.eu.int
JARZEMBOWSKI	Georg	M	D	PPE-DE	gjarzembowski@europarl.eu.int
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CUSHNAHAN	John Walls	M	IRL	PPE-DE	jcushnahan@europarl.eu.int
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