



MUCH ADO, LITTLE AFOOT? How the Nordics approach Taiwan

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ABSTRACT

As the Taiwan issue has become increasingly sensitive in the past several years, the Nordic governments are struggling to strike the right balance amid widespread calls for stepping up the support for Taiwan and deepening concerns about violating China's notorious core interests. Against the wider backdrop of current European engagement with/detachment from Taiwan, this report provides an in-depth empirical mapping and comparison of how the five Nordic countries – Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden – are handling their unofficial political relations with Taiwan. Focusing on each country's "One China" policy, its practical management of bilateral relations and its Taiwan-related parliamentary activism, the report finds that the Nordics can be divided into a set of "isolationist" countries (Iceland and Norway) with virtually no direct channels of institutionalised bilateral interaction and a group of "commercial pragmatists" (Denmark, Finland and Sweden) who operate trade offices in Taipei alongside Taiwanese representative offices in their own capitals. The report shows that all the Nordic governments have recently adopted a very cautious approach in the face of Beijing's increasingly assertive imposition of its "One China" principle. Indeed, the growing willingness of parliamentarians in some of the Nordic countries (notably Sweden) to put Taiwan on their political agenda has been to little avail as long as the Nordic governments continue to ignore or curtail Taiwan-related queries and proposals. Until the Nordic governments clarify their position – ultimately by rejecting (or endorsing) the "One China" principle – the state of Nordic-Taiwan relations will remain fragile and contested.

LIST OF TERMS/ABBREVIATIONS

Althinget	Parliament of Iceland
Bundestag	Parliament of Germany
Eduskunta	Parliament of Finland
EC	European Commission (of the EU)
EEAS	European External Action Service (of the EU)
EP	European Parliament (of the EU)
FDI	Foreign direct investments
FTC	Finland Trade Center
Folketinget	Parliament of Denmark
MEP	Member of European Parliament (of the EU)
MFA	Ministry of foreign affairs
MP	Member of (national) parliament
Nordic countries	Denmark, Iceland, Finland, Norway and Sweden
PRC	People's Republic of China
Reg(j)eringen	The government (in Danish, Norwegian and Swedish)
Riksdagen	Parliament of Sweden
ROC	Republic of China (Taiwan)
Stortinget	Parliament of Norway
TCDT	Trade Council of Denmark, Taipei
TRO	Taipei Representative Office
TSMC	Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company
TW	Taiwan (Republic of China)
WHA	World Health Assembly (decision-making body of the WHO)
WHO	World Health Organization (of the UN)



INTRODUCTION¹

Amid heightened tensions between the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the West, Taiwan has attracted growing attention in Europe. Apart from its geopolitical centrality in the US-China rivalry, Taiwan has also made headlines because of its indispensable role as a high-tech fabrication hub for the world's most advanced semi-conductors and its transformation into a beacon of liberal democracy in a region shaped by the rise of an authoritarian China. As Beijing has stepped up its political isolation and military intimidation against the island state in the past few years, Europe has struggled to find any common ground when addressing the Taiwan issue. Whereas some European countries have been quite vocal in their support of Taiwan, others have largely ignored or dismissed the conflict as being of little concern to Europe. In between these outlying positions, the majority of European countries appear intent on maintaining the status quo, developing their relations

with Taiwan only in a discreet manner that does not challenge the “One China” policy (see Box 1). However, the ill-defined limitations of the One China policy, along with its historically evolving interpretations, has left an open-ended and highly contested political terrain for practicing bilateral relations with Taiwan. Shedding some comparative light on this terrain not only seems worthwhile in itself, but can also help to inform decision-makers about the current range of political options at a time when Beijing is imposing and policing its own “One China” principle (see Box 1).

This report maps the empirical variation of European countries’ bilateral relations with Taiwan, focusing in particular on the five Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden). In order to provide the overall context of Europe’s changing relations with Taiwan, the first part of the report examines the recent flurry of initiatives from Brussels, in particular the European Parliament (EP), aimed at strengthening and expanding Europe’s ties to the island state. It subsequently identifies the variation of positions among individual European governments by briefly comparing a group of countries that shape the political terrain in different ways. Distinguishing between “isolationists” and “expansionists”, the report places Bulgaria and Greece in the first category, Czechia and Lithuania in the latter and finds the European great powers of France and Germany to be leaning in opposite directions. The second part of the report zooms in on and compares various aspects of the Nordic countries’ political relations with Taiwan – i.e. their One China policies, practical arrangement of unofficial relations and parliamentarian activism concerning Taiwan – to situate the Nordic region within the broader European landscape.

Widely regarded as staunch supporters of liberal democracy and with a proven track record of being openly critical of China’s repressive measures in Hong Kong and Xinjiang in recent years, the Nordics would seem like ideal candidates for adopting an expansionist Taiwan agenda to forge closer bonds to the island state. The report demonstrates, however, that the Nordic governments have kept a very low profile in the public domain, refraining from directly criticising Beijing for its intimidation of Taiwan, avoiding any concrete steps in support of the Taiwanese, and even ignoring recent Chinese encroachments on their One China policies. While two of the Nordic countries, Iceland and Norway, have completely turned their backs on the Taiwanese with no bilateral interaction of any kind, Denmark, Finland and Sweden maintain a narrow set of commercially-driven relationships based on trade offices in Taipei and representative offices in Copenhagen, Helsinki and Stockholm. Moreover, with the notable exception of the Swedish Riksdag and, to a much lesser extent, the Danish Folketing, the Nordic parliaments have done little to place Taiwan on the political agenda or shore up support for the Taiwanese. In the wider European landscape, two

of the Nordic countries can thus be classified as “isolationists” (Iceland and Norway), while the other three can be described as “pragmatists”. Although the purpose of this report is to map the differences and similarities in how the Nordic countries, and Europe more broadly, relate to Taiwan, the final assessment offers some reflections on how to explain the observed differences.

It should be noted from the outset that the report concentrates on the political dimension of relations with Taiwan, thus leaving aside all the substantive components on which the bilateral relationships hinge in practice (i.e. trade, investments, cultural exchange, research cooperation etc.). More specifically, the report explores the political dimension of bilateral relations from the perspective of Europe, offering no insights into how the Taiwanese perceive or practice these relationships (except with respect to their representative offices in the Nordic region). The findings of this report are based exclusively on publicly available primary and secondary sources. The author did manage to arrange a series of interviews with civil servants in the Nordic ministries of foreign affairs (MFA) in November and December 2023. But given the sensitivity of the Taiwan issue, these interviews were conducted only for background purposes, and no information obtained from them is traceable to any of the observations or findings in the report. The author has previously travelled to Taiwan, but not in the context of preparing this report, and the author has received no kind of support from the Taiwanese, nor been in contact with any Taiwanese government representatives in the past couple of years. While the report is funded by the Danish Ministry of Defence and is part of a wider Indo-Pacific program at the Danish Institute for International Studies (DIIS), its specific research design, analysis and findings are the sole responsibility of the author. The report has been subjected to a double-blind external peer review process coordinated by the Foreign Policy and Diplomacy unit at DIIS.

BOX 1	One China policy	One China principle
<p>Minimalist definition (as currently defined by most Western governments and the Chinese government respectively)</p>	<p>The diplomatic recognition of the People’s Republic of China as the sole legal government of China (with no specification of Taiwan’s political status)</p>	<p>The claim that Taiwan is an inalienable part of the People’s Republic of China.</p>
<p>Additional elements (some current interpretations)</p>	<p>Unofficial relations can be developed with Taiwan across various areas, including trade and culture.</p> <p>The Cross-Strait conflict must be resolved peacefully and with the consent of both sides.</p>	

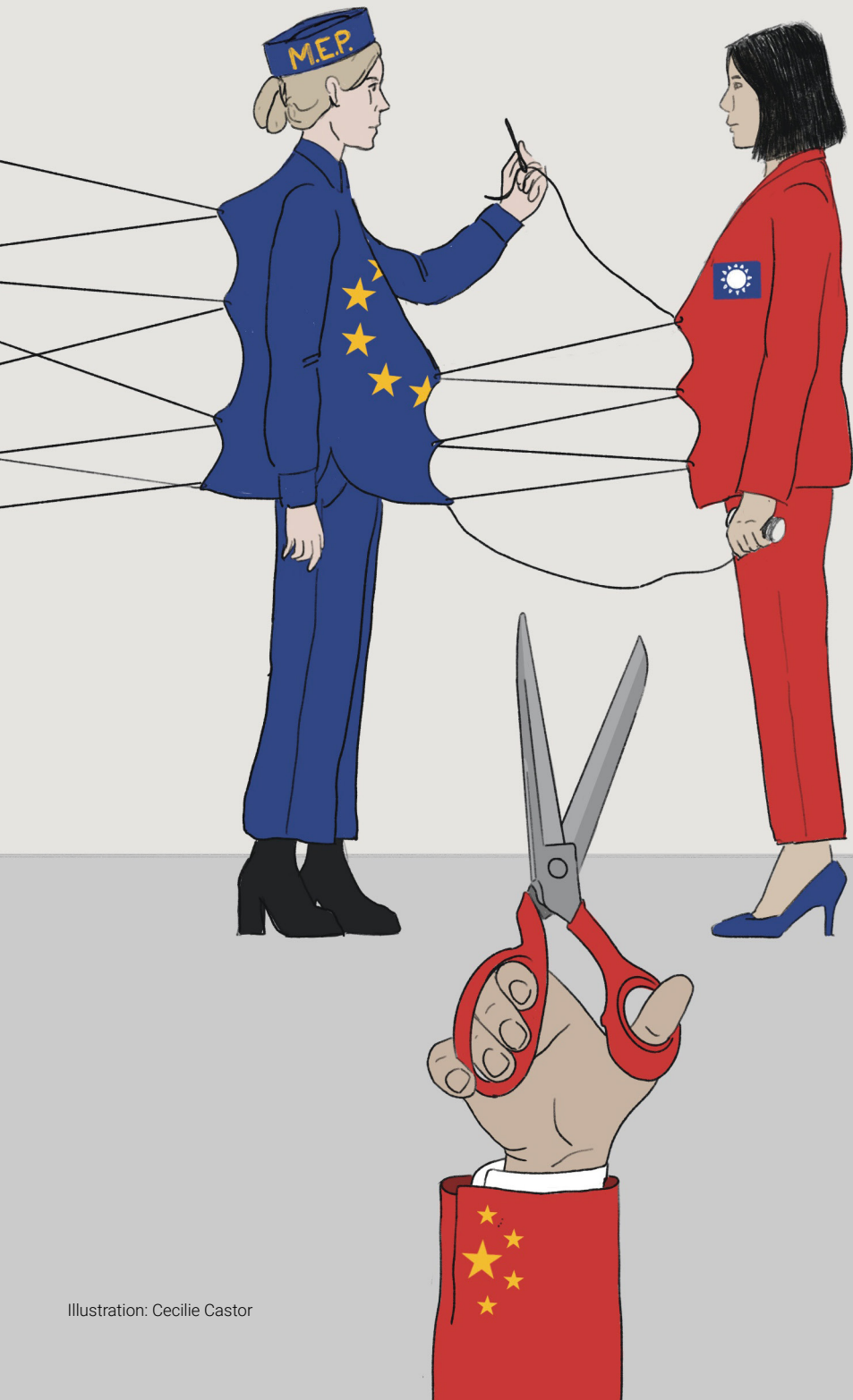


Illustration: Cecilie Castor

PART I: MAPPING EUROPE'S CHANGING RELATIONS WITH TAIWAN

When the PRC staged a series of unprecedentedly intimidating military exercises around Taiwan in response to then-US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's visit to the island state in August 2022, the European Parliament (EP) issued a spirited statement of solidarity with the Taiwanese. In its resolution (424 in favour, 14 against), the EP condemned China's show-of-force, underlined the Taiwanese people's right to decide their own future and characterized Taiwan as a "like-minded partner" of strategic importance to the EU (EP 2022). Meanwhile, the EU member states were collectively far more restrained in their response with the EU High Representative, on their behalf, signing on to a brief G7 statement entitled "Preserving Peace and Stability Across the Taiwan Strait" (EEAS 2022a). As is often the case, the unanimity requirement of the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy prevented the member states from jointly taking a stronger stand. Part I of this report examines first how the supranational EU institutions have recently increased their focus on and expanded their relationship with Taiwan. It then goes on to describe the main patterns of variation among the member states in how they relate to Taiwan.

BRUSSELS BUILDS BONDS TO TAIPEI

At first glance, little appears to have changed in the past few years. In October 2023, upon his return from China to co-chair the EU-China Strategic Dialogue, EU High Representative Josep Borrell reminded the European public that "Our One China Policy remains unchanged" (EEAS 2023). On closer inspection, however, the One China policy has been oddly absent in recent EU statements, including chairwoman of the European Commission (EC) Ursula von der Leyen's important speech in March

2023 on the EU's relations with the PRC (EC 2023). Indeed, apart from a footnote in the EU's 2019 strategic "Outlook on China" (EC 2019), the One China policy is largely confined to documents and statements concerning Brussels's relations with *Taiwan*, usually along the lines of: "While the European Union pursues its One China policy and recognizes the government of the People's Republic of China as the sole legal government of China, *the EU and Taiwan have developed solid relations and close cooperation in a wide range of areas* (EEAS 2021b, own emphasis)." Moreover, Borrell himself has on a number of occasions publicly reflected on the conditional nature of the EU's One China policy: "[It] does not prevent us – the European Union – from persisting and *intensifying* our cooperation with Taiwan" (EEAS 2022b, own emphasis). "In our view, there is only one China. But not under any conditions. And certainly not through the use of force" (Borrell 2023).

In fact, rather than constituting a fixed nucleus in bilateral relations between Brussels and Beijing, the One China policy did not really emerge as the official EU position on Cross-Strait relations until 2003 (EC 2003: 11) and not in a consistent manner before 2007 (EUC 2007: 8). Instead, the EU would refer to and explicitly endorse the "One China principle" (e.g. EC 1999), the "One Country, Two Systems" (e.g. EUC 1998) or use vague formulations such as "constant principles guiding its policy, i.e. its attachment to One China" (EC 2005). In the past few years, the EU has further demonstrated the plasticity of its One China policy by adopting a wide range of resolutions and initiatives aimed at expanding Europe's relations to Taiwan. Spearheading these endeavours, the EU lawmakers in Strasbourg have given the island state a far more prominent position on the parliament's foreign policy agenda. For example, the EP's January 2020 resolution on the implementation of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) contained just one Taiwan reference stating "its support for Taiwan's meaningful participation in international organizations, mechanisms and activities" (EP 2020). Three years later, the EP's 2023 resolution on the CFSP included no less than 21 Taiwan references (spanning seven paragraphs, i.e. #72-78) with one of them (#76) underlining how "Taiwan is a key EU partner and democratic ally in the Indo-Pacific region" and strongly urging "the EU and its Member States to intensify cooperation and pursue a comprehensive enhanced partnership with Taiwan" (EP 2023).

Taiwan's elevated status in Brussels was on full display in October 2021, when the EP adopted its first resolution dedicated entirely to relations between the EU and Taiwan (EP 2021). The opening paragraph of the resolution declares that the two sides are "like-minded partners that share common values of freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law", whereas the PRC has been increasingly depicted

as a “systemic rival” (EC 2019; EC 2023). Moreover, the resolution listed a wide variety of proposals to “encourage increased economic, scientific, cultural, political and people-to-people exchanges, meetings and cooperation between the EU and Taiwan [...], including at the most senior levels, so as to fully reflect the dynamic, multi-faceted and close cooperation between the EU and Taiwan as like-minded partners” (EP 2021). Nearly a year later, the EP issued a second strongly worded Taiwan resolution (mentioned above) in response to what has been widely regarded as the fourth Taiwan Strait Crisis, triggered by Pelosi’s visit in August 2022 (EP 2022). In another show of solidarity, the EP has also dispatched its first official delegation for a three-day Taiwan visit, headed by French MEP Raphaël Glucksmann who was quoted as saying: “You are not alone. Europe is standing with you” (Wu 2021).

Given the non-binding character of these resolutions, the EP has primarily wielded normative power by fostering a strong sense of political-ideological community with the Taiwanese (see also Krumbein 2023). Meanwhile, the EC and the EEAS have stepped up their cooperation with Taiwan in both strategic and practical terms. Declaring that “Taiwan plays a fundamental role in our Indo-Pacific vision due to our shared values, deep economic ties, and Taiwan’s key role in global supply chains” (EEAS 2021a: 5), the EC has singled out Taiwan in the EU’s Indo-Pacific strategy as part of ongoing efforts to build diversified, resilient supply chains in critical strategic sectors and to strengthen international digital governance (EC 2021). As an early feather in the EU’s star-spangled cap, Taiwan’s world-leading chipmaker, TSMC, has recently announced a USD 11 billion investment plan to build a microchips supply chain in Germany, thereby catapulting Taiwan into a key partnership position in the EU’s new Chips Act (Blanchard & Escritt 2023). Moreover, with the EU having long been the largest foreign investor in Taiwan – representing more than a fourth of Taiwan’s total FDI stocks – the two sides decided in June 2022 “to modernize their existing Trade and Investment Dialogue so as to cover key topics linked to trade and security, such as semiconductors, supply chains, export controls, FDI screening and R&D” (EC 2022). To show off the multifaceted relationship between the two sides, the EEAS has converted the annual “fact files” into sleek brochures providing an overview of bilateral cooperation that, apart from trade and investment, comprises extensive human rights dialogues, joint research and innovation programs under the Horizon Europe framework, institutionalised cultural exchange (e.g. film festivals), and a variety of (Erasmus-funded) students exchange programs. Tellingly, in all these areas, the EU has conversely found it increasingly difficult to cooperate with the PRC in the past few years.

However, while Brussels is currently cultivating closer ties to Taiwan, the engagement process is not moving as far or as fast as some would like. For instance, the long-stalled Bilateral Investment Agreement, eagerly advocated by the Taiwanese government, recently suffered a major setback when EEAS officials dismissed the economic rationale for such an agreement, drawing a sharp rebuke from Taipei (Malinconi 2023). A frustrated Taiwanese foreign minister, Joseph Wu, even felt the need to remind the Europeans that “when a country is in shortage of computer chips, they will ask Taiwan [for supplies], but they don’t seem to be thinking about a broader picture of better relations with Taiwan, economic or otherwise” (Lau 2023). As the EC tends to be on the backfoot in contentious questions of foreign policy that divide the member states into different camps, the next step in mapping Europe’s relations with Taiwan will be to assess the variation among individual countries.

EXPANSIONISTS, ISOLATIONISTS AND PRAGMATISTS: COMPARING INDIVIDUAL EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

It would be a tall order to ask for unity among the EU member states with respect to their Taiwan policies. Policy consensus is difficult at the best of times, but Beijing has also exerted heavy pressure on the member states to heed its red lines, chief among which is the Taiwan issue. The variation of policy positions is therefore considerable with some member states (i.e. “expansionists”) advocating for deeper engagement and stronger displays of solidarity with Taiwan, and others (i.e. “isolationists”) openly questioning Europe’s engagement with Taipei or simply ignoring Taiwan all together. Many European countries, including the Nordic countries, prefer to place themselves somewhere in-between (i.e. “pragmatists”), but identifying these outlying positions from the outset helps us to set the scene for the comparative analysis. Rather than distinguishing between expansionists and isolationists, some observers have proposed to set “vanguards” against “laggards” (with pragmatists in the middle) to capture the same variation of policy positions (Simalcik et al. 2023). Yet, although these terms aptly reflect how individual countries position themselves against the backdrop of the deepening European-level (EU-led) engagement with Taiwan, it also seems to carry normative/teleological connotations that can be avoided by adopting a more neutral terminology.

Table 1 (page 16) compares how a group of European countries relate to Taiwan. In order to maximise the variation of positions and assess the current policy gap between expansionists and isolationists, the report selects those countries that – based on existing sources – are usually depicted as outliers. Apart from two



Photo and description: Ann Wang/Reuters/Ritzau Scanpix
The Speaker of the Chamber of the Deputies of Czech Republic Marketka Pekarova Adamova leaves after visiting the parliament in Taipei on March 28, 2023.

expansionists (Czechia and Lithuania) and two isolationists (Bulgaria and Greece), the report also examines two European great powers (France and Germany) that traditionally play a leading role in shaping the policy positions of smaller states. The aim here is not to explain the observed variation – i.e. the underlying reasons for taking an expansionist or isolationist stance – but merely to describe the different positions.

Isolationists: Bulgaria and Greece

“Isolationist” may seem like a strong term, but it quite accurately captures Bulgaria and Greece’s policy position towards Taiwan. To begin with, both countries have, unlike the vast majority of European countries, explicitly endorsed the One China principle as clearly stated on the homepage of the Bulgarian MFA: “The Republic of Bulgaria adheres to the One China principle, considers Taiwan as part of China” (MFARoB 2023).¹¹ Sofia’s acceptance of the One China principle has also been actively propagated in domestic Bulgarian media by Chinese officials (especially the local Chinese ambassador) without being countered by Bulgarian officials (Filipova 2023). Although the Greek MFA claims to subscribe to the One China policy on its homepage (MFAHR 2023), Athens in 2019 signed on to a joint statement with Beijing reaffirming Greece’s “commitment to the One-China *principle*, its respect for China’s sovereignty and territorial integrity and its support for the unification of China”

TABLE 1. Selected European countries' bilateral relations with Taiwan

Country	Year of recognition of the PRC + One China position	Type of bilateral representations with Taiwan	Ratio of bilat. trade with China/Taiwan (+ China's share of total export)	Highest-level bilateral visit to Taiwan after Aug. 2022	No. of overall/ bilateral "interactions" with Taiwan (since 2019) ²
Bulgaria	1949 One China principle	None	Exports: 26 Imports: 14 (3.4%)	None	2/0
Czechia	1949 ³ One China policy	TRO in Prague ⁴ + Czech Economic & Cultural Office Taipei	Exports: 10 Imports: 23 (1.43%)	Speaker of the parliament in March 2023	67/36
Denmark	1950 One China policy	TRO in Copenhagen + The Trade Council of Denmark	Exports: 6 Imports: 18 (5.9%)	None ⁵	18/7
Finland	1950 One China policy	TRO in Helsinki + Finland Trade Center in Taiwan	Exports: 11 Imports: 13 (5.8%)	MP in Feb 2023	12/4
France	1964 One China policy	TRO in Paris + French Office in Taipei	Exports: 12 Imports: 19 (4.9%)	Vice-president of the French senate in April 2023	71/33
Germany	1972 One China policy	TRO in Berlin + German Institute Taipei	Exports: 11 Imports: 13 (7.7%)	Education minister in March 2023	67/29
Greece	1972 One China Policy (or Principle?)	TRO in Athens None in Taiwan	Exports: 20 Imports: 55,5 (1.5%)	None	2/1
Iceland	1971 One China policy	None	Exports: 4 Imports: 20 (2.0%)	None	0 ⁶
Lithuania	1991 One China policy	TRO in Vilnius ⁷ + Lithuanian Trade Representative Office	Exports: 8 Imports: (0.8%)	Speaker of the parliament in October 2023	75/50
Norway	1950(1954 ⁸) One China policy	None	Exports: 22 Imports: 21 (5.8%)	Leader of the Liberal Party in November 2023	??
Sweden	1950 One China policy	TRO in Stockholm ⁹ + The Swedish Trade & Invest Council	Exports: 11 Imports: 13 (4.3%)	MPs in May & August 2023	24/9

TRO = Taipei Representative Office

Data based on trade in goods in 2021 (source: OEC)

Data based on the EU-Taiwan Tracker (ETT 2023)

Nordic countries
 Expansionist countries
 Isolationist countries
 European great powers

(MFAHR 2019, own emphasis). A similar Greek endorsement of the One China principle could also be found on the Chinese MFA's homepage in 2022, following a conversation between the two countries' foreign ministers (MFAPRC 2022a).

According to the EU-Taiwan Tracker, Bulgaria and Greece are placed at the very bottom among the European countries when it comes to tracing all types of political, economic and cultural contacts and exchanges with Taiwan since January 2019 (ETT 2023). The only bilateral event registered took place in April 2023 when former Taiwanese president Ma Ying-jeou visited Greece and his hosts tellingly referred to him as "Former President of Taipei/ of Kuomintang Party – Chinese Taipei". Even though the Taiwanese have established a Taipei Representative Office (TRO) in Greece (but none in Bulgaria), it hosts next to no substantive activities (other than informing about students exchange programs), and the Greek authorities have allegedly even instructed its civil servants not to attend events organised by the TRO (Feng 2023). In neither country has the Taiwan issue been raised in/by their respective parliaments (except for a brief, dismissive exchange in the Greek parliament in 2020; see Pavlidis 2020); nor have their governments stated their concerns about the risks of an armed conflict in the Taiwan Strait. Indeed, Taiwan is, to put it succinctly, a non-issue in both Bulgaria and Greece.

Expansionists: Czechia and Lithuania

Czechia and Lithuania are at the forefront of current endeavours to expand bilateral European relations and shore up support for Taiwan. While both of them formally adhere to the One China policy, each has, in practice, seriously challenged it from the perspective of the Chinese government. Prague accepted an unprecedented (in a European context) direct telephone call from the Taiwanese president to her Czech counterpart in January 2023 and two months later sent an equally unparalleled 150 member-strong delegation to Taiwan, including the speaker of the parliament and the chairpersons of both the foreign and defence committees (Šebok 2023). Meanwhile, Vilnius allowed the Taiwanese to establish a representative office in Lithuania under the name of "Taiwanese" rather than "Taipei" (as is customary practice), prompting Beijing in August 2021 to recall its ambassador to Lithuania and effectively reduce the latter's diplomatic status in Beijing to the level of *chargé d'affaires* (Andrijauskas 2023: 90-91). Moreover, key decisionmakers in both countries have touted like-mindedness, in terms of sharing foundational political values, as a central component of their expansionist agenda. This was clearly stated by the speaker of the Czech parliament during her Taiwan visit (Reuters 2023), and by Lithuania's foreign minister who was the highest-ranking European government

official to publicly voice his support for Pelosi's Taiwan visit: "Now speaker Pelosi has opened the door to Taiwan much wider, I am sure other defenders of freedom and democracy will be walking through very soon" (Lau, 2022).

The expansionist mindset of the Czech and Lithuanian governments is also more broadly demonstrated by their significant number of interactions with Taiwan in the past few years (according to the EU-Taiwan Tracker, see Table 1). Lithuania and Czechia stand out among the European countries as the two most active countries in terms of bilateral engagement (with respectively 50 and 36 interactions registered). Especially noteworthy has been not only the constant flow of visiting parliamentary delegations from the two countries, but also the significant number of memorandums of understanding aimed at expanding cooperation on a wide range of issue areas, including semiconductors, satellites, biotechnology, scientific research, and finance (in the case of Lithuania) and information technology, semiconductors, culture, academia, cyber security and healthcare (Czechia). Even more controversial was the news that Czechia is about to sign a deal to send howitzers and other wheeled military equipment to Taiwan (Militarnyi 2023). As such, Prague and Vilnius have in the past few years been pushing the boundaries for what kind of bilateral relations a European country can cultivate with Taiwan without officially jettisoning the One China policy.

Far from a two-stroke engine: France and Germany

Traditionally one of Europe's staunchest proponents of an independent European foreign policy, France has recently experienced a strong backlash from its European partners for proposing that same formula to the Taiwan issue: "The worse thing would be to think that we Europeans must become followers on this topic and take our cue from the U.S. agenda and a Chinese overreaction", as the French president, Emmanuel Macron, put it on his way back from a three-day state visit to China in April 2023, adding that Europe should avoid "getting caught up in crises that are not ours" (Anderlini & Caulcutt 2023). If Macron's statements are viewed against the backdrop of the controversial declaration in 1994 "that the French government *recognises* the government of the People's Republic of China as the sole legal government of China, *and Taiwan as an integral part of Chinese territory*" (RF 1994, own emphasis and translation), it would seemingly place France firmly within the isolationist camp. However, France's position is somewhat more nuanced – or oxymoronic. Today, the French government claims to embrace the One China policy and to support an expanded role for Taiwan in international organisations such as the WHO (RF 2021). In the past few years, France has also been among the most active European countries in engaging Taiwan on several fronts (with 36 bilateral

interactions according to the EU-Taiwan tracker), and French lawmakers have visited the island state on various occasions (e.g. Liu 2023). Nevertheless, gone are the days when France could be categorised as a “vanguard” country in its relations with Taiwan, operating in the early 1990s as its only major European arms provider (selling Mirage fighters and La Fayette-class frigates; see Wudunn 1992).

Meanwhile, Germany has also been struggling to come to terms with its Taiwan relationship amid drawn-out efforts to prepare its first China strategy and widespread calls for reducing Germany’s dependency on China (Bartsch & Weseling 2023). Although the new strategy recapitulates Germany’s official One China policy since 1972, it hastens to add that “Germany has close and good relations with Taiwan in many areas *and wants to expand them*” (FFO 2023a, own emphasis). On its homepage, the German MFA further clarifies that “Taiwan and Germany are important partners, sharing values and enjoying close and substantial economic, cultural, scientific and academic relations” (FFO 2023b). Indeed, in the past few years, Germany has ranked among the most Taiwan-engaging countries in Europe (see Table 1), drawing headlines in July 2023 for receiving the Taiwanese minister of justice and, in particular in March 2023, for unprecedentedly sending a sitting cabinet official, the minister of education, to Taiwan to sign a bilateral cooperation agreement on science and technology (DW 2023). Moreover, the Bundestag has been quite supportive of Taiwan not only in terms of dispatching parliamentary delegations to Taiwan, but also by, for instance, adopting a resolution in May 2022 that calls on the German government to push for Taiwan’s participation in WHO activities (Liu 2022). And at the height of the Taiwan Strait crisis in August 2022, German politicians, including foreign minister Annalena Baerbock, were among Europe’s most vocal critics of China’s military intimidation – a stance that was reiterated by Chancellor Olaf Scholz recently (AP 2023). Taken together, although Berlin seeks to maintain a stable and pragmatic relationship with Beijing, Germany has at the same time emerged as one of Europe’s expansionists. The recent news about involving TSMC in building a major German-based semiconductor industry (Blanchard & Escritt 2023) will further cement the growing ties between the two countries.

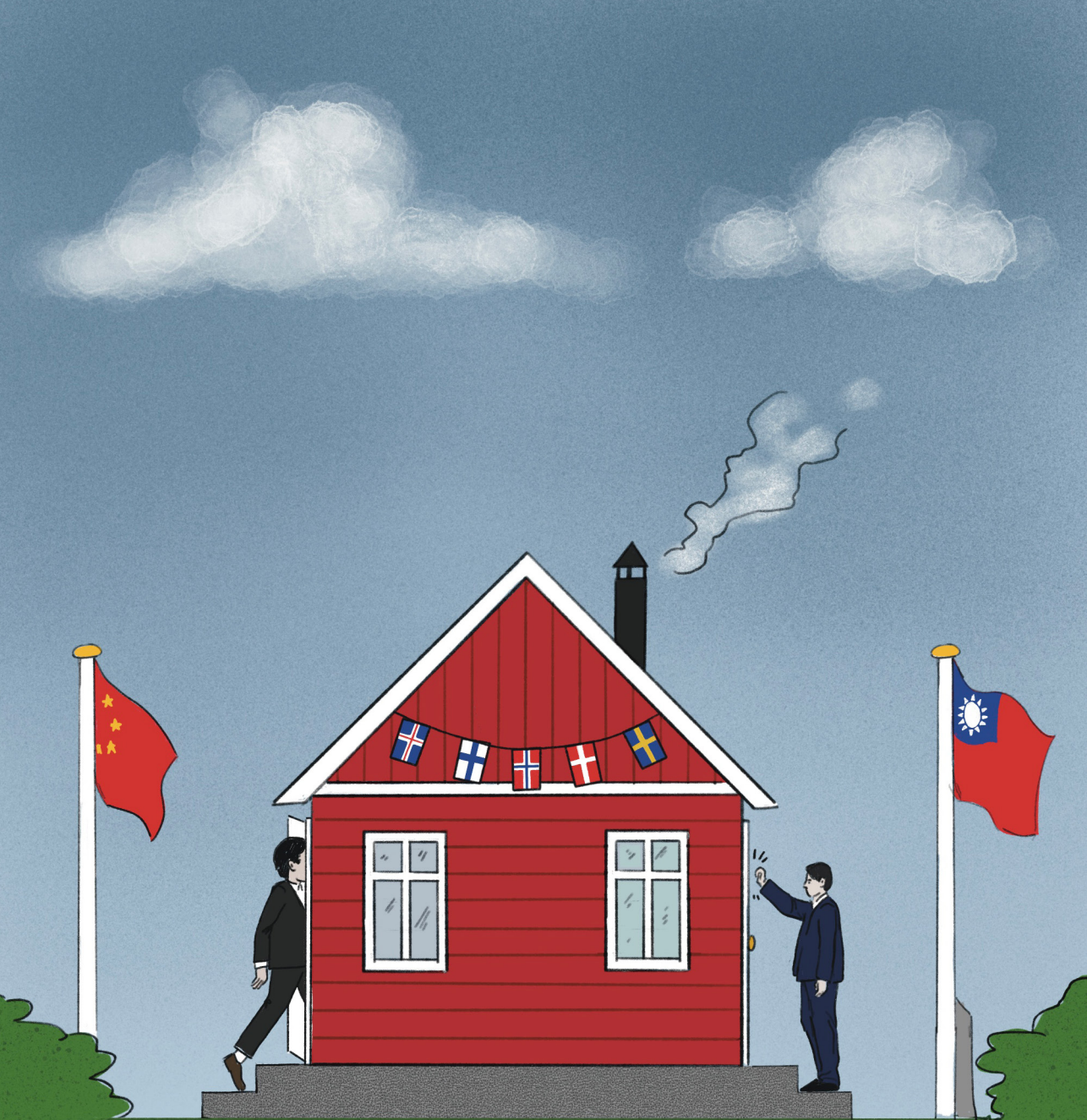


Illustration: Cecilie Castor

PART II: NORDIC APPROACHES TO TAIWAN

Although far from in lockstep, the five Nordic countries enjoy a long tradition of policy coordination and see themselves as like-minded partners on the international stage, notably in questions of political values and human rights (Forsby 2021). In the past few years, all of them have adopted a more critical view of China as security-related concerns and sensitive political issues have come to the fore of their bilateral relations with the PRC (Forsby 2022). They have even been willing to confront the Chinese government on sensitive topics as demonstrated, for instance, by their joint (together with the three Baltic countries) Xinjiang statement in May 2021 expressing their “grave concern” about the “large network of so-called ‘political re-education camps’” (ibid.). Part II of the report addresses the questions of whether the Nordic countries have also been prepared to challenge Beijing on the Taiwan issue, whether they have been expanding their engagement with Taiwan and whether they are dealing with the issue in a similar, even coordinated, fashion. Comparing their approaches to Taiwan across three specific dimensions – their One China policies, practical arrangements of bilateral relations and parliamentary activism – the report takes a closer look at how the Nordic countries relate to Taiwan in a political sense despite having no official state-to-state relations with the Taiwanese.

A DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD? DEFENDING THEIR ONE CHINA POLICIES

The Nordic countries (except for Iceland) have often prided themselves on being among the very first Western countries to recognise and establish diplomatic relations with the PRC in 1950. In doing so, they simultaneously derecognised the Republic of China (ROC, Taiwan), thereby acknowledging the claim that there is only

one China in terms of international legal rights of sovereignty (i.e. the One China policy) even if the ROC would hold on to its seat in the UN for another two decades. Despite their early diplomatic recognition of the PRC, however, the Nordic countries have – with some notable exceptions¹¹ – avoided officially embracing Beijing’s One China principle. Instead, the Nordics have attempted to tread a fine line as exemplified by the joint statement of the Chinese and Icelandic governments upon establishing official diplomatic relations in 1971: “The Chinese Government reaffirms that Taiwan is an inalienable part of the territory of the People’s Republic of China. The Icelandic Government *takes note of this statement* of the Chinese Government” (MFAPRC 2002, own emphasis), with the statement adding only that “The Icelandic Government recognizes the Government of the People’s Republic of China as the sole legal Government of China”.

Over the years, the Nordics have generally stuck to their One China policies and walked a careful tightrope by refraining from official, high-level political interactions with the Taiwanese, while pursuing economic, cultural and other types of relations with the island state. Yet, as the Nordic governments avoided clearly stipulating the limitations and implications of their One China policy, practices of bilateral interaction with the Taiwanese have varied significantly. For a long time, this vagueness worked well as it allowed some flexibility that was apparently tolerated by Beijing. For instance, in 1992 the Swedish minister of communications became the first Nordic minister to visit Taiwan meeting, among others, the Taiwanese president, and in 1994 the Taiwanese foreign minister was welcomed in Stockholm where he held a semi-official meeting with his Swedish counterpart (Davies & Bohman 2022; Johansson 2023: 16-17). The Danes would soon follow suit, dispatching their minister of industry and energy to Taiwan in 1993 to hold conversations with Taiwanese ministers, including the premier, despite officially describing the visit as private (Brødsgaard 2000: 291). Interestingly, no strong-worded public reactions were reported from Beijing. This phase of experimental expansionism ended in the mid-1990s as the Nordic countries first normalised their relations with the PRC (following their boycott imposed in the aftermath of the Tiananmen massacre) and then started to deepen their cooperation with a rising China.

Since around 2016, when Cross-Strait relations started to significantly deteriorate and Beijing accordingly embarked on a far more assertive approach to the Taiwan issue, the Nordic countries’ One China policies have come under increasing pressure. One example emerged in late 2021, when Xinhua, CGTN and other Chinese state media quoted state councillor and foreign minister, Wang Yi, for welcoming

“Denmark’s adherence to the One China *principle*” (CGTN 2021, own emphasis) following a bilateral meeting with his Danish counterpart Jeppe Kofod. When the Danish media noticed the controversial endorsement, the Danish MFA insisted (e.g. Bonde Broberg 2021) that Kofod had been misquoted, but refrained from issuing a public correction, thus leaving the Chinese claim undisputed (in the English language media). A similar episode occurred in Iceland in August 2022, when the local Chinese ambassador, He Rulong, on the embassy webpage as well as in a local Icelandic newspaper claimed that “The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Iceland recently reiterated that ‘Like the vast majority of countries in the world, Iceland has recognized one and undivided China’” (even quoting the alleged statement by the MFA in Icelandic; see MFAPRC 2022b). The Icelandic MFA has not publicly commented or objected to the Chinese ambassador’s claim. Around the same time, the Chinese ambassador to Norway observed that he had discussed the Taiwan Strait Crisis with representatives of the Norwegian government, adding that “I believe that both the Norwegian government and people support our Taiwan policy. The One China policy and the fact that Taiwan is part of China” (Ulvin 2022). The Norwegian government declined to make any comments.

The Chinese government has also exerted pressure on the Nordic governments in other ways to change their designation of Taiwan or Taiwanese citizens. In Finland, the Chinese embassy in 2018 demanded that the Finnish Immigration Service refrained from referring to “Taiwan, Republic of China” in their lists of “country of origin”, prompting the Finnish state agency to leave out “Republic of China” and keep “Taiwan”, but without adding “China” as the embassy had demanded (Chen & Kallio 2023: 29). Other Finnish governmental agencies have allegedly been approached by the Chinese with similar demands (ibid.). Meanwhile, some Swedish governmental agencies have seemingly been pressured into changing their labelling with, for instance, the Swedish Tax Agency substituting their designation of Taiwan from “Republic of China (Taiwan)” to “Taiwan, province of China” (Olsson 2018). Although the relabelling was prompted by a specific request from the Swedish MFA (ibid.), it should be noted that this and similar decisions were made against the backdrop of an intensive pressure campaign from Beijing directed at international companies, organisations and governments to categorise Taiwan as a “province of China” (Hsiao 2018). The same type of relabelling also appears to have crept into the Danish MFAs official designation of its Trade Office in Taipei, which is now presented on its webpage as one of Denmark’s four representations in *China*: Beijing, Guangzhou, Shanghai and Taipei” (UM 2024, own emphasis).

Despite Beijing's recent efforts to impose its One China principle on the Nordic countries, the Nordic governments officially remain committed to their One China policy (see Table 2 for an overview and Appendix 2 for more details). In the past decade, all five Nordic countries have at some point declared their adherence to the One China policy, either through joint statements with the PRC (Denmark, Iceland, Norway) or in official governmental China strategies (Finland, Sweden). Moreover, some of the Nordic governments (Denmark, Norway, Sweden) have broadly outlined their One China policies in similarly worded terms during domestic debates in their respective parliaments. For instance, in November 2022, the Norwegian foreign minister, Anniken Huitfeldt, observed in Stortinget that "Norway pursues a one-China policy like most countries in the world. Norway recognises the People's Republic of China and relates to the authorities in Beijing as the proper authority of China... Like most other countries, Norway does not recognise Taiwan as an independent state.

The issue of reunification between the mainland and Taiwan is, of course, an issue that should be resolved through dialogue and peaceful means" (Stortinget 2022b, own translation).

Table 2. How the Nordic countries communicate their One China policies to the outside world via unilateral or bilateral statements

Country	Type of statement on One China policy	Year (most recent + references)	Source
Denmark	Confirmation only	2023 [UM 2023]	Joint statement with the PRC
Finland	Brief specification (modelled on EU line)	2021 [MFAF 2021]	Governmental China strategy
Iceland	Confirmation only	2013 [GI 2013]	Joint statement with the PRC
Norway	Confirmation only	2016 [Regjeringen 2016]	Joint statement with the PRC
Sweden	Brief specification (modelled on EU line)	2019 [SG 2019]	Governmental China strategy

(See Appendix 2 for more details)

Nevertheless, only Finland and Sweden have chosen to briefly specify (rather than merely declare) their One China policies in their external communication (with international society), and both countries refer directly to the EU's One China policy as the underlying framework. While the Nordic governments have undoubtedly left their One China policies as vague and unspecified as possible in order to maximise their flexibility in how they relate to Taiwan, this ambiguity has now become a double-edged sword: as long as the Nordics One China policies remain so open-ended, the Chinese government can exploit its leverage in other domains to impose its One China principle on the Nordics. That is, given that the Nordic governments have never clearly distanced themselves from the Chinese notion that Taiwan is an inalienable part of the PRC, the Nordics will constantly find themselves on the defensive when addressing questions such as: How to refer to Taiwan, how to classify Taiwanese citizens, how to interact with the Taiwanese authorities, and how to maintain meaningful relations with Taiwan in the face of China's political isolation?

Nordic countries have not only allowed some "backsliding" with respect to their official designation of Taiwan/Taiwanese, but have also been reluctant to counter Chinese misinformation about their own One China policies. Because of the vagueness of their policies and the cautiousness of their approaches, the Nordic governments have come to handle their bilateral relations with Taiwan in an increasingly defensive manner.

DISCREET OR DISENGAGED? PRACTICING BILATERAL RELATIONS WITH TAIWAN

Turning, next, to the practical arrangement and conduct of their non-official bilateral relations with Taiwan, the Nordic states have far from synchronised their individual approaches. Broadly speaking, Denmark, Finland and Sweden can be categorised as commercial pragmatists who operate differently customized trade offices in Taipei and have allowed the Taiwanese to establish representative offices in their own capitals primarily for the sake of facilitating economic exchanges. Meanwhile, Iceland and Norway have adopted isolationist positions with very few direct lines of bilateral interaction and no alternative (multilateral) channels of representation (i.e. via institutionalised EU-Taiwan dialogue mechanisms), as neither of them are EU member states. Below, the political-administrative framework for bilateral relations is briefly compared without accounting for the scope and depth of economic and other areas of cooperation.

Denmark established its first presence in Taiwan in 1983, opening the so-called Danish Trade Organization that was later renamed The Trade Council of Denmark, Taipei (TCDT). Today, the office is staffed with eight full-time employees, two of whom are Danish citizens. For several years now, the head of the TCDT has been a career diplomat posted from the Danish MFA, but the specific arrangement merely reflects the fact that the Danish Trade Council is placed within the MFA instead of the national business authority (Erhvervsstyrelsen). Indeed, the TCDT is headed by a “director” whose office, apart from providing consular services, strives “to further develop and significantly expand Danish commercial positions just as we will be aiming to provide high quality assistance to the [local] Danish community” (Sand 2023). The Danish expat community in Taiwan has been growing in recent years as Denmark has assumed a leading position in Taiwan’s transition to green energy, with scores of Danish companies (including CIP and Ørsted) investing massively in Taiwan’s offshore wind industry, often in partnership with local companies (Denmark even became Taiwan’s top-FDI investor in 2022, with around USD 3.5 billion; see Kærgard 2023). Despite this expansion of commercial activities, the Danish government has refrained from initiating any direct, high-level dialogue with the Taiwanese authorities, preferring instead to rely on the EU Commission’s institutionalised dialogue mechanisms or lower-level lines of ad hoc communication via the TCDT. On its side, Taiwan has administered an office in Denmark since 1973, which in 1995 received its current name “Taipei Representative Office (TRO) in Copenhagen” (Brødsgaard 2000: 290). Officially headed by a representative (currently a former Taiwanese general), the TRO provides consular services, maintains contacts with relevant Danish authorities, assists Taiwanese companies, and arranges cultural outreach events (TROiD 2023a).

Finland set up an Office of Finnish Industry and Trade in Taiwan in 1991 which, after several rounds of organisational restructuring, has since 2018 been operating from Taipei as the Finland Trade Center (FTC). Just like its Danish equivalent, the FTC is placed within a broader governmental business and investment-promoting agency, Business Finland, but as the latter is not part of the Finnish MFA, no Finnish diplomats have so far been stationed at the FTC (Chen & Kallio 2023: 29-30). The trade centre is headed by a director and currently staffed with four employees, two of whom are Finnish citizens. Apart from helping connect Taiwanese and Finnish commercial stakeholders, it offers limited consular services and only “guidance in passport and visa matters”, with applicants instead being referred to the Finnish Consulate in Hong Kong for the processing and issuing of documents (MFAF 2023). Although not operating at quite the same capacity in Taipei as their Danish or Swedish counterparts, the Finnish government has upgraded its bilateral relations

with Taiwan in other ways, taking the initiative in 2011 to establish bi-annual Finland-Taiwan Trade Talks as well as an annual business forum event (Chen & Kallio 2023: 29). The seventh round of trade talks took place in Taipei in 2022, with the Finnish delegation headed by the under-secretary of state at the Finnish Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment (Taiwan Today 2022b). In Helsinki, the Taiwanese established the “Taipei Trade and Cultural Office” in 1990 which was given its present name in 2004, “Taipei Representative Office in Finland” (Chen & Kallio 2023: 14). Led by a representative, who has actively befriended Finnish MPs across different political parties (Chen & Kallio, 2023: 32), the TRO undertakes approximately the same range of commercial, cultural and representational activities as its sister offices in Copenhagen and Stockholm (TROiF 2023).

Iceland has never opened any sort of representational office in Taiwan, and the Icelandic government’s webpage for Iceland abroad merely lists Taiwan as “Chinese Taipei” with no other information (GI 2023). Nor have the Taiwanese ever established a foothold in Iceland, leaving the TRO in Denmark to offer assistance to Taiwanese citizens and companies located in Iceland (TROiD 2023b), while the TCDT helps Taiwanese citizens with long-stay visas in Iceland.

Norway had a trade office in Taiwan from 1980 until 2004 when it was closed by the Norwegian government. During the same period, the Taiwanese operated their own Taipei Economic and Cultural Office in Oslo which stayed open for another 13 years before it was finally shuttered in 2017. According to its last representative in Norway, the situation became particularly untenable after the 2010 Nobel Prize incident between China and Norway: “Norway is still afraid of angering China and thus keeps even more distance from Taiwan now than a few years ago” (Berglund 2012). Since 2017, Norwegian citizens in need of long-stay visa in Taiwan or other types of consular assistance have been referred to the TRO in Sweden, which is also assisting Norwegian companies in Taiwan-related matters. When recently asked about the current state of bilateral relations between Norway and Taiwan, the Norwegian foreign minister observed that “we have no plans to consider establishing our own representation office in Taiwan. Our needs for representation and exchange of information are covered by our embassy in Singapore” (Stortinget 2022b, own translation). She added that “Taiwan is neither part of Norway’s, nor EFTAs priorities” when it comes to proposed negotiations on a free-trade arrangement.

Sweden has had a continued presence in Taiwan since 1982, when the non-governmental Swedish International Trade Representative Office was established, succeeded in 1990 by the Swedish Trade Council in Taipei, which is administered by

the semi-governmental organisation Business Sweden (Davies & Bohman 2022: 13-15). In recent years, a “Market Manager” from Business Sweden has been running a one-person trade office, offering some consular service for both Swedish and Taiwanese citizens¹² and providing a contact point in Taiwan for the Swedish MFA (BS 2023). Meanwhile, the private organisation Swedish Chamber of Commerce, located in the same office building in Taipei, has a sizable staff dedicated to pursuing Swedish business opportunities in Taiwan as well as branding Sweden/Swedish culture in Taiwan (SCCT 2023). Rather than relying only on the EU’s institutionalised economic dialogue with Taiwan, the Swedish government – like the Finnish – holds its own direct bilateral trade talks with the Taiwanese at the level of state secretaries often in conjunction with an annual Taiwan-Sweden Joint Business Council Meeting (the most recent round of talks took place in November 2022; see Taiwan Today 2022a). A single ministerial meeting between the two sides took place in 2019, when the Swedish minister for research and education received her Taiwanese counterpart in August 2019, jointly signing a memorandum of understanding on academic cooperation (Taiwan Today 2019). From Stockholm, the Taiwanese have since 1981 run a TRO that in 1994 was renamed from “Taipei Trade, Tourism and Information Office” to “Taipei Mission in Sweden” (only the Latvian TRO is similarly named in Europe). Currently staffed with 14 employees and headed by a representative with a background as a career diplomat, the Taipei Mission in Sweden is the largest Nordic TRO, with its Economic Division in charge of promoting trade, investment and technology cooperation between Taiwan and the Nordic countries (TMiS 2023).



Photo and description: Official Photo by Wang Yu Ching / Office of the President
President Tsai meets delegation from Swedish-Taiwanese Parliamentarian Association.

RALLYING CRY OF THE RIKSDAG: PARLIAMENTARIAN ACTIVISM IN SUPPORT OF TAIWAN

While the Nordic governments have maintained a cautiously defensive position in recent years, the Nordic parliaments – just like their counterparts in other European countries – have been at the forefront of raising Taiwan-related issues and demonstrating support for the Taiwanese. This type of parliamentary activism, unevenly distributed among the Nordic parliaments, has primarily manifested itself through Taiwan-related interpellations, debates and motions that have shed a critical light on the defensive position of the government. Apart from such awareness-raising and agenda-setting work in the parliaments, other gestures of support include MP delegation visits to Taiwan and friendship group activities. Table 3 provides an overview of the scope of parliamentary activism in the Nordic countries. It should be noted that although two of the Nordic parliaments, the Icelandic Althing and the Finnish Eduskunta, do not use interpellations as a means for asking formal questions to the minister, all the Nordic parliaments regularly host foreign policy debates where Taiwan-related questions can be raised.

The observable variations in the patterns of parliamentary activism are striking. At one extreme, we find Iceland with barely any references to Taiwan during debates in the Althing since 2018. Almost as neglected a topic in the Finnish Eduskunta, the Taiwan issue has only recently (i.e. since 2022) been addressed to voice concerns about a potential Chinese military attack on Taiwan and its implications for NATO and international order. In the Norwegian Storting, the Taiwan issue has also been largely absent, with no interpellations dedicated to Taiwan and only a few China-focused interpellations touching briefly upon Taiwan-related concerns (e.g. Stortinget 2022a). Yet in late 2022, Venstre (the centrist Liberal Party) initiated a debate about strengthening Norway's trade and cooperation with Taiwan, putting forward a motion with several specific recommendations, including a proposal to re-establish Norway's representation office in Taipei and another one to initiate negotiations on a free-trade agreement with Taiwan (Stortinget 2022b). In her response at the end of the debate, foreign minister Anniken Huitfeldt was unequivocally dismissive of all the proposals, thereby lowering the prospects of any progress in Norway-Taiwan relations in the near term (the motion was rejected by a large majority).

The Danish Folketing has placed the Taiwan issue on its political agenda on several occasions in the past couple of years. Apart from 10 Taiwan-specific interpellations, four of which have revolved around the exclusion of Taiwan from the WHA, the Folketing has held two debates on Taiwan with the second one primarily addressing

“China’s growing pressure on Lithuania”, but focusing almost as much on the Taiwan issue and Denmark’s One China policy. The first debate in January 2021 was raised by the opposition to force the minority (Social Democrats) government to join a coalition of Western countries actively promoting Taiwanese membership of the WHA. Claiming that the Danish government already works on many levels to support Taiwan’s re-entry into the WHA, foreign minister Jeppe Kofod did his utmost to appeal to his colleagues in the Folketing for restraint and cooperation on this issue,

TABLE 3. Parliamentarian activism during 2018-23

	Taiwan debate [public debate in parliament with minister]	Taiwan interpellations [formal, written questions to ministers]	MP delegation visits	Taiwan friendship group	Most active political parties
Denmark [Folketinget]	#1 TW’s accession to WHA [14.01.2021] #2 Chinese pressure on Lithuania ¹³ [29.03.2022]	10 in total * WHO/WHA (4) * Corona vac. (2) * Rep. office/ Lithuania (2) * Direct flights (1) * Eco. coercion (1)	1 (MP Pia Kjaersgaard in October 2019)	Yes (since 2004)	Venstre, Konservative, Frie Grønne, Dansk Folkeparti
Finland [Eduskunta]	None [13 references during other debates - mostly to threat of Chinese attack on TW] * Threat of Chinese attack on TW	None	1 (MP Mikko Kärnä in February 2023)	Yes (since 1994)	N/A
Iceland [Althinget]	None (1 reference during other debate)	None	None	No (never)	N/A
Norway [Stortinget]	#1 Increased trade and cooperation with TW [17.11.2022]	None ¹⁴	1 (MP Guri Melby in November 2023)	No (not currently)	Venstre
Sweden [Riksdagen]	5 interpellation debates #1 – WHA #2 – HK implicat. #3 – TW relations #4 – TW relations #5 – WHA	92 in total * WHO/WHA (22) * Mil. threat (10) * Rep. office (8) * TW’s name (6) * Others (46)	25 7 MPs in August 2023 6 MPs in August 2023 4 MPs in May 2023 8 MPs in April 2022	Yes (since 2000)	Sverigesdemokraterna, Moderaterna, Liberalerna, Kristdemokraterna

(See Appendix 1 for details)

invoking the limitations of the One China policy and warning the foreign policy speakers about “raising doubts about Denmark’s One China policy” or “politicizing Taiwan’s formal status” (Folketinget 2021). Although the government succeeded in taking the motion off the table, the issue arose once again during the second Taiwan debate in March 2022, where the final resolution “encouraged” (rather than forced) the government to help Taiwan reclaim its observatory membership of the WHA (Folketinget 2023). The resolution, in which the Folketing both acknowledges the One China policy and expresses its appreciation for Denmark’s economic and cultural exchanges with Taiwan, was adopted unanimously. Indeed, only one of the parties (the left-wing socialist Enhedslisten) questioned the One China policy during the debate (although still supported the final resolution).

At the other extreme, we find Sweden as the scope of the Taiwan debate in the Riksdag dwarfs that of all the other Nordic parliaments put together. The sheer number (92) and topical range of Taiwan-related interpellations (mostly involving the foreign minister) are probably unrivalled in a wider European context. Mostly put forward by the Sweden Democrats (Sverigesdemokraterna, a right-wing populist party) and the Moderates (Moderaterna, a conservative party), the interpellations have raised topics such as Taiwan’s exclusion from the WHA (22 interpellations), China’s military intimidation of Taiwan (10), the work and status of Sweden’s representation office in Taipei (8) and the Swedish Tax Agency’s re-labelling of Taiwan as a province in China (6). While the opposition parties have used the interpellations to expose and criticise the government for insufficient support of Taiwan, the foreign minister has mostly sought to deflect the criticism by providing rather limited replies to the MPs, often without properly answering the questions. The members of the Swedish parliament are also frequently submitting Taiwan-related motions to the Riksdag (no less than 19 since 2018¹⁵), including repeated proposals for government to support Taiwan’s participation in international organisations such as the UN General Assembly, the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), WHA and others (see Appendix 1 for the details). The vast majority of these motions are not adopted by the Riksdag, with the important exception of a proposal in October 2021 (finally approved in April 2022) to establish a new expanded representative office in Taipei named House of Sweden (only the members of the Social Democrats minority government voted against the motion).

Although the Swedish opposition parties have been extremely active in raising awareness about Taiwan-related issues in the Riksdag, their efforts have been to little avail in terms of influencing the Swedish government’s approach to Taiwan. Not only has the government refused to adopt any of the numerous proposals put

forward by parliamentarians including, for instance, a proposal to send a letter of congratulation to the re-elected Taiwanese president (Riksdagen 2020), to cultivate military-to-military relations with the Taiwanese (2021), to invite the Taiwanese government to participate in the informal “Leadership Network” established by the Swedish prime minister (Riksdagen 2022b), or to speak up for the Taiwanese to help them take part in the UN’s annual climate change summit (COP28; see Riksdagen 2023b). Even worse (from a Riksdag perspective), the ministers rarely offer any direct, much less sufficient, answers to the submitted interpellations. Tellingly, the continuation of this practice under the current minority conservative government (the Moderates taking over from the Social Democrats in October 2022) goes to demonstrate the resilience of the status quo. When the new foreign minister, Tobias Billström, was asked during an interpellation debate in the Swedish Riksdag what the current government is doing to strengthen Sweden’s representative office in Taipei (in line with the approved Riksdag motion on establishing a House of Sweden), Billström merely informed the Riksdag that the motion had been received by the government (Riksdagen 2023a).

Another aspect of parliamentary activism in the Nordic countries is the presence of Taiwan friendship groups. Given the ambiguities of Taiwan’s political status, the friendship groups generally keep a relatively low profile, with little publicly available information about their respective members or activities in the Nordic parliaments. Unsurprisingly, there is no Taiwan friendship group to be found in the Icelandic Althing, nor presently in the Norwegian Storting. In the Danish Folketing, a friendship group has existed since 2004 (Ritzau 2004), headed until recently by the foreign policy speaker of Venstre (the Liberal Party), which is now part of the current centrist coalition government. Although not listed among the 37 friendship groups on its webpage (Eduskunta 2023), a Finnish-Taiwan friendship group has allegedly existed in the Finnish Eduskunta since 1994 (Chen & Kallio 2023: 31) with Mikko Kärnä as its chairperson (Suomenmaa 2023). Only the Swedish Riksdag officially recognises, among the 45 friendship groups listed on its webpage, the existence of a Taiwan friendship group (Riksdagen 2024), which has existed since 2000 (Johansson 2023: 20) and is currently headed by a member of the Moderates (Sagerfors 2023). Based on indirect evidence,¹⁶ few Nordic parliamentarians seem to attend Taiwanese anniversaries or other events hosted by the TROs in Copenhagen, Helsinki and Stockholm, and those parliamentarians that do show up typically belong to one of the populist rightwing parties (i.e. the Sweden Democrats and Danish People’s Party).

A final component of Nordic parliamentary activism is MP delegation visits to Taiwan. Unlike the other two components, these visits attract a great deal of media attention as they constitute more specific gestures of support in defiance of Beijing's political isolation of Taiwan. For instance, the recent Taiwan visit by Guri Melby (leader of the small opposition party Venstre), the first by a Norwegian MP in 14 years, was covered extensively in the Norwegian media, thereby giving new political impetus to the Taiwan issue (e.g. NRK 2023). The Finnish MP Mikko Kärnä, another devoted Taiwan supporter – if controversial for his anti-Sámi and anti-immigrant views (Chen & Kallio 2023: 31) – made a Taiwan visit in early 2023 to voice his support and, like Melby, meet the Taiwanese president (Suomenmaa 2023). No Danish parliamentarians have travelled to Taiwan since 2019, when Pia Kjærsgaard, former speaker of the Danish Folketing and chairwoman of the Danish People's Party, visited the island state. This is quite remarkable not only because several members of the Foreign Relations Committee in the Folketing had clearly indicated their willingness to make such a visit in the aftermath of the Pelosi controversy in August 2022 (Kjeldtoft 2022), but also because the members of the committee ended up traveling to China instead for a week-long official visit in October 2023 (Fast & Sjöberg 2023). In contrast to their Danish counterparts, the Swedish parliamentarians seemingly have no similar reservations as testified by the fact that no less than 25 Riksdag members (from across the political aisles) have visited Taiwan since early 2022.



Photo and description: Ole Berg-Rusten/NTB/Ritzau Scanpix
Summit between the Nordic Council and the Nordic prime ministers.

CONCLUDING ASSESSMENT

The aim of this report has been to empirically map the variations in how Europe, in particular the Nordic countries, relate to Taiwan in the political domain. Although this may seem like a peculiar analytical exercise given the lack of official diplomatic relations between Europe and Taiwan, the hyper-sensitivity of the issue and the mere fact that European countries interpret their One China policies quite differently from one another make it worthwhile to shed some comparative light on current bilateral relations.

The report first placed the spotlight on how the EU institutions have recently stepped up their support for Taiwan, as manifested in particular through the unprecedented efforts of the EP to forge a strategic partnership based on shared political values.

Moreover, the EC has not only accentuated the ultimately conditional nature of its One China policy in the face of China's military intimidation of Taiwan, but also shown a willingness to deepen the EU's already multifaceted relationship with the Taiwanese, notably with respect to advanced technologies and critical supply chains. Meanwhile, the EU member states have been struggling to find any common ground. "Isolationist" countries such as Bulgaria and Greece – apparently backed by a Macronian France that refuses to be "caught up in crises that are not ours" – are turning their backs on Taiwan. Meanwhile, "expansionist" countries such as Czechia and Lithuania, and to some extent Germany, have been testing the limits of the One China policy by engaging the Taiwanese quite actively in the political realm and also cultivating several new areas of cooperation. In between these positions, the large majority of EU member states appear to be "pragmatists" who want to maintain the status quo and support Taiwan only as long as it does not risk challenging the One China policy.

Providing a more detailed comparative analysis of how the five Nordic countries relate to Taiwan bilaterally, the second part of the report focused on three specific dimensions of these relationships. First, it was shown that although all the Nordics have publicly declared their adherence to the One China policy in the past decade, the vagueness of this policy, the cautiousness of their approaches and the growing assertiveness of Beijing, have put the Nordic governments on the defensive as Beijing seeks to impose its One China principle. Second, when it comes to the practical arrangement and conduct of their non-official bilateral relations with Taiwan, the Nordic countries are divided into, on the one hand, a set of isolationist countries (Iceland and Norway) with virtually no direct channels of institutionalised bilateral interaction and, on the other, a group of commercial pragmatists (Denmark, Finland and Sweden) who, for the sake of promoting economic interests, operate differently organised trade offices in Taipei alongside Taiwanese representative offices in their own capitals. Third, with respect to Taiwan-related activism in the Nordic parliaments, the report demonstrated that, apart from Iceland (no activities) and Finland (few activities), MPs in two of the Nordic parliaments (the Danish Folketing and the Norwegian Storting) have recently taken some initiatives to place Taiwan on their political agendas. However, their activism has been completely dwarfed by the extremely spirited, engaged and multifaceted work done by Swedish MPs from across the aisles to raise awareness about Taiwan's difficult situation and put pressure on the Swedish government to support the island state more actively (albeit to no avail so far).

SAME, SAME, BUT DIFFERENT? WHAT LIES BENEATH THE OBSERVED PATTERNS

As viewed from a broader European perspective, all five Nordic countries can be placed along the isolationist-pragmatist side of the spectrum. Whereas the Nordic governments have generally been among the most vocal and active European critics of China since 2018, they have adopted a relatively defensive, even detached, posture with respect to the Taiwan issue. The reasons for this seem to be not only the hypersensitivity of the Taiwan issue in combination with Beijing's growing assertiveness, but also the importance the Nordic governments attach to China as a trade partner (see Table 1) as well as a key actor for solving global challenges (as the Nordic governments keep reminding their domestic audiences). Nevertheless, the report has also pointed to notable differences among the Nordic countries which the rest of this section will briefly seek to account for.

If not for its adherence to the One China policy, Iceland would be the odd man out among the Nordics with no kind of bilateral relations with the Taiwanese, nor any parliamentary activism in support of Taiwan. Rather than attributing Reykjavik's isolationist position to its free-trade relationship with China – Iceland actually happens to be the least China-dependent economy among the Nordics (see Table 1) – there is probably a stronger case to be made for the general limitations of Reykjavik's diplomatic resources, Icelandic companies' lack of interest in Taiwan and the absence of a "protective layer" of EU partners. Still, as a small liberal democracy that prides itself on supporting like-minded small states (being the first country to officially recognise the Baltic states), Iceland's complete disregard for Taiwan appears somewhat odd.

Having effectively severed all existing bilateral links with the Taiwanese over the past two decades and recently shown no appetite for re-engaging the government in Taipei, Norway's isolationist position also stands out when compared to Denmark, Finland and Sweden. While Oslo's abandonment of the Taiwanese preceded its six years' diplomatic deadlock with Beijing (2010-16), the onerous process of restoring Norway's relationship with China seems to have instilled in the Norwegian government an unwillingness to challenge Beijing on its core interests (as openly noted in their joint statement from 2016; see Regjeringen 2016). With strong economic ties to China and no hotline to Brussels in case of a new China crisis, any attempt at restoring some sort of bilateral relationship with Taiwan appears risky and attracts few proponents in the Norwegian Storting (outside Venstre).

Among the other three Nordic countries that maintain different shades of commercial pragmatism in their bilateral relationships with Taiwan, Sweden distinguishes itself to some extent. Not because of the one-off reception of a Taiwanese minister in Stockholm in 2019 or the annual trade talks with the Taiwanese, since this is more than offset by the Swedish government's unwillingness to upgrade its understaffed representative (trade) office in Taipei administered by Business Sweden. What is remarkable, however, is the Riksdag's indefatigable efforts to pressure the government into expanding bilateral relations and increasing its support for Taiwan. This recent activist spree seems, at least partially, to have been prompted by China's coercive diplomacy against Sweden (2017-21, Forsby & Sverdrup-Thygeson 2022), which has generated extremely negative views of China along with sympathy for Taiwan and a willingness among parliamentarians to stand up for the Taiwanese. Yet, Sweden does not belong to the group of expansionist countries in Europe such as Czechia and Lithuania as long as the government in Stockholm continues to do its utmost to curb or ignore all the Taiwan-related proposals from the Riksdag.

NOTES

- 1 The author would like to express his gratitude to Nils Peschke-Køedt and Samuel Berlin for their extensive assistance in compiling the comparative data for this report.
- 2 Number of country-specific ‘interactions’ according to the EU-Taiwan Tracker (excluding ‘PRC’s response’ and a few de facto duplicates)
- 3 Diplomatic recognition by the Czechoslovakian government.
- 4 The TRO in Czechia is called ‘Economic and Cultural Office’.
- 5 Former Danish Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen visited Taiwan in January 2023, but that was solely in his capacity as chairman of the Alliance of Democracies Foundation ((19) Opslå | LinkedIn).
- 6 This number is based on a google query in English and Icelandic covering the same period as the EU-Taiwan Tracker.
- 7 The TRO in Lithuania is called ‘Taiwan Representative Office’.
- 8 Norway was the first of the Nordic countries to recognize the PRC, but it was not until 1954 that the two countries established formal diplomatic relations (Bekkevold, 2021: 70-72).
- 9 The TRO in Sweden is called ‘Taipei Mission in Sweden’.
- 10 The Bulgarian government even warns potential Taiwan travelers of “increased level of risk” and refers visa-applying citizens to its embassy in Beijing or consulate in Shanghai.
- 11 For instance, in 2002 the Norwegian foreign minister, Jan Petersen, stated in a written answer to an MP that “Norway has, like the vast majority of countries in the world, a One China policy, which means that *Taiwan is regarded as a part of China...*” (author’s own translation and emphasis): <https://www.stortinget.no/no/Saker-og-publikasjoner/Sporsmal/Skriftlige-sporsmal-og-svar/Skriftlig-sporsmal/?qid=25432>. As late as in 2010, Jonas Gahr Støre (then foreign minister, presently prime minister) clarified Norway’s One China policy in another written answer to an MP, saying that “Norway recognizes the People’s Republic of China, in which *Taiwan, according to international law, is a constituent part*” (author’s own translation and emphasis): https://www.regjeringen.no/no/dokumentarkiv/stoltenberg-ii/ud/svar-til-stortinget/sporetimesporsmal/2010/svar_observator/id604630/.
- 12 The Swedish Trade Office cannot, for example, issue Swedish residence permits for Taiwanese citizens, nor can it renew passports for Swedish citizens living in Taiwan.
- 13 The debate was primarily about China’s pressure on Lithuania, but Taiwan and Denmark’s ‘One China’ policy figure prominently throughout the debate.
- 14 Taiwan is briefly mentioned in a few interpellations that concern themselves with China.
- 15 This number does not include resubmitted motions, nor motions that do not exclusively focus on Taiwan (see Appendix 1). If these omitted motions were included, the total number would increase to 52.
- 16 The Taipei Representative Offices usually publish photos of their events that enable one to identify (some of) the participants.

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APPENDIX 1

The appendix takes up too much space to be included here, but it can be obtained from the author upon request (abfo@diis.dk).

APPENDIX 2

Country	Most recent confirmation/specification of 'One China' policy	Source
Denmark	Official Danish position (confirmation of policy, but no publicly available definition): "The Chinese side appreciates Danish adherence to its unchanged one-China policy" [UM 2023].	Joint statement in 2023.
	Domestic debate (in Danish, own translation): "...like the UN, the EU and the vast majority of countries in the world, [Denmark] does not recognize Taiwan as an independent nation. This means that there are no diplomatic or formal political relations with Taiwan. However, Denmark has a valued economic and cultural cooperation with Taiwan, which is being developed (Folketinget 2022)."	Foreign Minister during debate in Folketinget in 2022.
Finland	Official Finnish position: "The EU and Finland are committed to their One China policy. They recognise that the People's Republic of China represents China and do not maintain official relations with Taiwan. Finland considers the peaceful development of relations across the Taiwan Strait crucial. Like other EU Member States and peer countries, Finland considers Taiwan an important Asian economy with a functioning democracy and shared values, and it is therefore natural to promote areas such as the economy, trade, education, culture, science, technology, welfare and health. Finland engages in bilateral activities with Taiwan in these areas and in doing so, does not take a position on Taiwan's international status. In line with the EU, Finland also supports Taiwan's meaningful participation in international organisations, which benefits the international community as a whole" [MFAF 2021].	Governmental Action Plan on China (from 2021)
Iceland	Official Icelandic position: "Iceland firmly adheres to the one-China policy and supports the peaceful development of crossStrait relations and the course of peaceful reunification of China" [GI 2013]. Domestic debate: (no defining statements found in publicly available sources).	Joint statement in 2013
Norway	Official Norwegian position (confirmation of policy, but no publicly available definition): "The Norwegian Government reiterates its commitment to the one-China policy" [Regjeringen 2016].	Joint statement in 2016
	Domestic debate (in Norwegian, own translation): "Norway pursues a one-China policy like most countries in the world. Norway recognises the People's Republic of China and relates to the authorities in Beijing as the proper authority of China... Like most other countries, Norway does not recognize Taiwan as an independent state. The issue of reunification between the mainland and Taiwan is, of course, an issue that should be resolved through dialogue and peaceful means" (Stortinget 2022b).	Foreign Minister during debate in Stortinget in 2022.
Sweden	Official Swedish position: "The strategy confirms that the EU adheres to the 'One China' policy, that the EU commits to maintaining strong links with Hong Kong and Macau and promoting respect for the 'one country, two systems' principle, and that the EU will continue to develop its relations with Taiwan. Sweden contributed actively to the development of the joint strategy on China" [SG 2019].	Governmental "Approach to matters relating to China" (from 2019)
	Domestic debate (in Swedish, own translation): "[Sweden] like all EU countries currently has diplomatic relations with China and does not see any possibility of recognizing Taiwan as a state. It also follows that Taiwan's representative office in Stockholm cannot be equated with an embassy. Notwithstanding this, the Government supports Taiwan's participation in international forums where participation is meaningful and does not require state status" (Riksdagen 2022a).	Foreign Minister during debate in Riksdagen

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