Digital Taiwan Lecture Series

Taiwan in Limbo: Challenges and Prospects for Participation in the United Nations System

Webinar Report

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Institute for Security & Development Policy

Stockholm Taiwan Center

About ISDP

The Institute for Security and Development Policy is a Stockholm-based independent and non-profit research and policy institute. The Institute is dedicated to expanding understanding of international affairs, particularly the interrelationship between the issue areas of conflict, security and development. The Institute's primary areas of geographic focus are Asia and Europe's neighborhood.

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LIST OF SPEAKERS

Dr. Antonina Luszczykiewicz-Mendis, currently a visiting scholar at the University of Oxford, is an Assistant Professor at the Jagiellonian University in Krakow, Poland. A former Fulbright Senior Scholar at Indiana University Bloomington in the United States, she is a political and cultural studies expert specializing in China–India relations and Poland–Taiwan interactions. Antonina has received numerous international grants and fellowships, including a research grant from the American-Polish Kosciuszko Foundation, a Confucian scholarship at Xi'an Jiaotong University (China), and the MOFA Taiwan Fellowship for research at Tamkang University (Taiwan). She is also a non-resident fellow at the Taiwan Center for Security Studies (TCSS) at the National Chengchi University in Taipei.

Dr. Zsuzsa Anna Ferenczy is an Affiliated Scholar at the Department of Political Science of Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Associated Research Fellow at the Institute for Security & Development Policy (ISDP Stockholm), Head of the Associates Network at 9DASHLINE, and Fellow at Agora Strategy, Munich. Based in Taiwan, Zsuzsa is an Assistant Professor at the National Dong Hwa University in Hualien. Between 2008 and 2020, Zsuzsa worked as a political advisor in the European Parliament. Her latest book, "Partners in Peace: Why Europe and Taiwan Matter to Each Other" was published in October 2024. Zsuzsa is a regular commentator in international media outlets. She tweets at @zsuzsettte

Moderators

Dr. Niklas Swanström, Executive Director, Institute for Security & Development Policy

Dr. Klement Ruey-Sheng Gu, Representative, Taipei Mission in Sweden

CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND

The Stockholm Taiwan Center of the Institute for Security and Development Policy held a webinar for the Digital Taiwan Lecture Series on September 12, 2025, to explore Taiwan's ongoing struggle to engage the United Nations (UN) system and discuss how current geopolitical dynamics may influence Taiwan's future participation in the international arena.

Dr. Antonina Luszczykiewicz-Mendis, Visiting Scholar at the University of Oxford, Assistant Professor at the Jagiellonian University in Krakow, and non-resident fellow at the Taiwan Center for Security Studies at the National Chengchi University in Taipei, and Dr. Zsuzsa Anna Ferenczy, Affiliated Scholar at the Department of Political Science of Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Associated Research Fellow at the Institute for Security & Development Policy (ISDP), Head of the Associates Network at 9DASHLINE, Fellow at Agora Strategy and Assistant Professor at the National Dong Hwa University in Hualien, were the two speakers, with Dr. Niklas Swanström, Executive Director at ISDP, and Dr. Klement Ruey-Sheng Gu, former Representative of the Taipei Mission in Stockholm, serving as moderators.

The webinar was recorded and made available on YouTube.

This report summarizes the main takeaways obtained from the webinar, from the understanding of the current framework surrounding Taiwan's efforts to gain recognition, to the analysis of its present international position.

STATE OF THE ART

Around autumn each year, the issue of Taiwan's exclusion from the international community resurfaces in global discussions. On September 9, the 80th session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA80) took place, while the 30th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC COP 30) will take place on November 10 and 11, 2025 in Belém, Brazil. Taiwan is excluded from both occasions.

Taiwan has not been a member of the UN since 1971, when the long-debated UN Resolution 2758 was adopted. Resolution 2758 recognizes the representatives of the Government of the People's Republic of China (PRC) as the only lawful representatives of China to the UN. However, it does not address the issue of Taiwan's sovereignty or explicitly determine whether Taiwan can be represented in the UN system.

Despite this, China consistently invokes Resolution 2758 to bolster its "One-China" principle, claiming Taiwan as an inalienable part of the PRC and blocking Taiwan's participation in the UN system and wider international community. To avoid its misuse, it is necessary to distinguish the difference between the "One-China" principle, and the "One-China" policy, terms often used interchangeably by mistake. The confusion arising from their intertwining has often been exploited at the expense of the island. The former reflects the PRC's official policy position: "There is but one China in the world, Taiwan is an inalienable part of China's territory, and the Government of the PRC is the sole legal government representing the whole of China". The latter instead reflects the various versions adopted by states. While usually acknowledging the principle, they don't explicitly endorse it, leaving space for strategic ambiguity and opening possibilities for unofficial engagement with Taiwan.

In recent years, Europe has increasingly addressed the issue through official statements. In October 2024, the European Union (EU) openly condemned China's misinterpretation of Resolution 2758 and its military provocations around Taiwan. In July 2025, German Minister for Foreign Affairs Johann Wadephul emphasized that UN Charter prohibits the use of force to resolve international disputes, in response to China's misuse of Resolution 2758.

Excluded from the UN system, Taiwan is barred from UN-affiliated organizations, including UNFCCC, which limits Taiwan's ability to contribute to global climate action and other pressing international issues. As a well-developed island with advanced technologies and a trustworthy government, Taiwan's exclusion represents a loss for the international community.

KEY TAKEAWAY 1:

IMPACTS OF THE DECREASING ROLE OF THE UNITED STATES

Trump's second administration has fueled growing instability and uncertainty within the international community. Its increasing detachment from the international liberal order, including disengagement from multilateral cooperation and declining support for international institutions is having major consequences worldwide, with particularly serious implications for Taiwan. The U.S. is indeed scheduled to leave UNESCO and withdraw from the Trans-Pacific Partnership and Paris Climate Agreement by the end of 2026. Shifting from being the main donor and capital provider for the developing world, to prioritizing domestic needs and security over global outreach, the U.S. is gradually retreating from its hegemonic position. This allows for potential reduced deterrence against China, while opening the space for strategic ambiguity, that the PRC can leverage to further advance its claims over the island.

In opposition to U.S. declining commitment to international cooperation, China's global outreach efforts have grown substantially in recent years. The PRC is creating an alternative framework to global governance, expanding its influence, exercising soft power abroad, and offering support and funding to regional neighbors through ad hoc multilateral organisms. This comprehensive strategy, combined with sustained investments in research and development, particularly in the fields of technology, AI and cybersecurity, further exacerbates Taiwan's strategic vulnerability.

These dynamics are intensified by China's growing assertiveness and ambitious agenda, which often challenge Western narratives. China has effectively projected its power and influence abroad, both regionally and beyond, to shape the discourse around Cross-Strait relations, manipulate the narrative over Taiwanese legitimacy, and leverage its economic and political power to drive countries away from the Taiwanese cause. The fact that the U.S. is retreating from international engagement further aggravates this dynamic, allowing China to leverage greater room to assert its influence.

KEY TAKEAWAY 2:

CHALLENGES TO EUROPEAN SUPPORT FOR TAIWAN

In 2021, the European Parliament proposed to "work closely with the Member States to intensify EU-Taiwan political relations and to pursue a

comprehensive and enhanced partnership under the guidance of the EU's One China Policy....." EU-Taiwan relations have indeed made notable progress in recent years, allowing for an emerging "Taiwan narrative" to widespread within the organization's borders, gradually pushing back on Beijing's "One China" principle. The EU, however, is made up of twenty-seven member states, each with its own national interests and priorities. Domestic policy dynamics often override cross-border commitments, as governments tend to prioritize internal stability, political interests, and public opinion over international consideration. The internal diversification of European voices creates a substantial challenge in reaching a unified stance on foreign policy issues and represents an obstacle to the formation of a collaborative policy or common framework in support of Taiwan. Beijing exploits this lack of understanding, consistency and strategic coordination to advance its own narrative and push back against rapprochement attempts.

An additional challenge in the European framework lies in the temptation to move closer to China amid turbulence in Transatlantic relations. Some member states view engagement with Beijing as a pragmatic way to secure economic advantages, thus undermining collective European alignment on the promotion of Taiwanese participation in international organizations.

KEY TAKEAWAY 3:

THE COST OF TAIWAN'S ABSENCE IN INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

The absence of Taiwan from international forums and organizations causes an inevitable loss for the whole international community. The sharing of knowledge and collaboration among like-minded democratic countries has brought about major benefits for the development and progress of all in fields ranging from healthcare to national security. The results of discarding Taiwan's potential contributions have already proved their harmful consequences in multiple instances. Taiwan's exclusion from the World Health Organization (WHO) has prevented transparent communication and early warnings, causing significant delays in early information sharing and slower coordinated response in both the SARS global outbreak and the most recent Covid-19 pandemic.

Moreover, Taiwan's exclusion from the international community creates a larger space for China to expand its influence in reshaping the global order, weakening the collective voice of like-minded democratic countries. In particular, the weakening of the rule of law, the decline in civil liberties,

and political polarization abroad have substantial repercussions for the stability of international norms, the cohesion of democratic alliances, and the ability of states to coordinate responses to global challenges.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Advancing Taiwan's participation in international organizations is a complex and politically sensitive challenge, shaped by competing international interests, geopolitical pressures, and the island's unique diplomatic status. At the same time, its inclusion in the international system is crucial for global health, security, and knowledge-sharing, as it allows the island to contribute its expertise and experience while strengthening multilateral cooperation. The reinforcement of democratic institutions and the values they stand for should be of interest to the whole international community. Their protection requires coordinated efforts, especially in supporting vulnerable aligned partners in the face of authoritarian pressure. Taiwan's defense is therefore important for the global order, and Europe should pursue it through more strategic and consistent efforts by recognizing the island's international status across international organizations.

The webinar highlighted different strategic measures the EU should undertake to facilitate Taiwan's participation in international organizations, including:

1. Enhance public awareness on the complexity of Cross-Strait relations, including Beijing's instrumentalization of the "One China" principle, and its differentiation from the "One China" policy. This strategy also includes countering the PRC's discourse that contributes to the distortion of EU's Taiwan narrative. To flip the narrative and expose the benefits of the contributions Taiwan could bring to the international community is in Europe's strategic interest.
2. Invest in strategic communication and counter Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI) campaigns carried out by the PRC to misrepresent Taiwan's image internationally. To build resilience through transparency, the EU should regularly release reports on information operations to help the public make objective judgements.
3. Rely on precedents to access international organizations. The lecturers brought about the examples of North and South Korea: while not recognizing each other, they are both UN members. Moreover, the World Health Assembly had invited Taiwan on a yearly basis as an observer under the name "Chinese Taipei" from 2009 to 2016. Building on these precedents,

Taiwan and its partners could advocate for a pragmatic approach that prioritizes functional participation over formal recognition, emphasizing Taiwan's technical expertise and constructive role in areas such as global health, disaster relief, and technology.

Europe has moved from a position of strict non-engagement with Taiwan in the political sphere to one of increasingly vocal support. Both the island and the EU should leverage this momentum to strengthen Taiwan's international standing and promote democratic values.

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