

## Prospects & Perspectives



In May this year, 22 French Senators from various parties signed a resolution in which they declared their “firm support” for Taiwan. The text was endorsed by nearly all the members of the France-Taiwan Friendship Group in the upper house of the French parliament. Bureau Français de Taipei, October 27, 2020, *Facebook*, <<https://www.facebook.com/franceataiwan/photos/pcb.3333508520101639/3333497376769420/>>.

### Taiwan’s Growing Presence in France and Its Influence on French Political Circles

*By Pierre-Antoine Donnet*

**I**n May this year, 22 French Senators from various parties signed a resolution in which they declared their “firm support” for Taiwan. The text was



endorsed by nearly all the members of the France-Taiwan Friendship Group in the upper house of the French parliament.

In the resolution, the Senators expressed their wish that Taiwan be allowed to participate at gatherings organized by the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Convention on Climate Change, and Interpol. In their view, granting Taiwan access to international organizations would not amount to officially recognizing Taiwan's independence from China.

“We wish that Taiwan, while not being recognized as a State, should at the very least be a political entity that is protected and has access to international authorities, wherever this is possible and useful to the international community as a whole,” said Alain Richard, a Senator of La République En Marche (LREM, the party of French President Emmanuel Macron) and chair of the France-Taiwan Friendship Group at the Senate.

Even if the resolution does not represent the views of the French government about Taiwan, it speaks volumes about the extent to which Taiwan's presence in France has blossomed in recent years.

Predictably, the resolution has led to a furious reaction from the Chinese embassy in Paris. “The ambassador has sent a letter to express his views on this matter. He considers that [this resolution] is contrary to the principle of ‘one China,’” China's envoy, Lu Shaye, declared.

Senator Joël Guerriau, vice chair of the friendship group, responded to Lu's outburst. “The pressures from the Chinese embassy in France are not tolerable,” he said. “We are free to express our minds and our actions,” he said. “These kinds of pressures do not honor China.”

The Senators' text was later supported across the political spectrum of senatorial groups. “Nothing should any longer prevent Taiwan from being part of the WHO,” said the centrist Senator Olivier Cadic. This text, said Bernard Jomier, a senator affiliated with the socialists, “is only justice and respect for all peoples of good will.”

The authors of the text believe that their initiative conforms with France's



official position towards Taiwan since 1964, the year when French President Charles de Gaulle officially recognized the People's Republic of China (PRC). That same year, France also established diplomatic relations with the PRC.

The Senators said their move followed the position taken by French Foreign Affairs Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian, who told the Senate in October 2020 that he was willing to support Taiwan's participation in international organizations. "Jean-Yves Le Drian made known that he was pursuing efforts at conciliation within these organizations so that Beijing would not be opposed to this. We wish to state publicly, at parliamentary level, that we support these efforts," said the LREM's Richard.

On April 1, Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen expressed her gratitude to the French Senate. Writing in French on her Twitter account, she said: "We are determined to contribute more to international organizations, and, with your help, we hope that the world will see what Taiwan has to offer."

In fact, Taiwan's diplomatic presence in France has grown significantly. On August 25, 2020, Taiwan's Foreign Ministry announced the opening of a second Taiwan Representation Bureau in Aix-en-Provence, southern France, adding to the one that has already been based in Paris for many years. These bureaus are de-facto embassies and consulates, even if they do not bear these names.

The Paris-based Taiwan bureau was first established in 1972 under the name "Promotion de Echanges Commerciaux et Touristiques avec Taiwan" (ASPECT), which changed its name to the "Bureau de Représentation de Taipei en France" in 1995.

When Taipei announced the opening of the new Aix-en-Provence office, China reacted with anger. Beijing said that this initiative went against the principle "that there should not be any contact with a country that [China] considers as part of its territory."

Further fueling the controversy, the office was opened on the eve of an official visit to France by Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi.



On March 31, 2020, a group of 72 French and 48 Taiwanese parliamentarians, together with medical and university officials, signed a text which stated that: “Taiwan should be able to collaborate freely with the WHO.” Again, this document led to a furious reaction from China.

In a letter dated April 12, the Chinese ambassador in Paris, Lu Shaye, said that Taiwanese authorities, supported by some French parliamentarians, had “insulted the WHO Director, Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus,” by reportedly calling him “a negro.” The authors of the text immediately and strongly denied such a claim by the Chinese envoy.

This exchange of words shows how deep the crisis in relations between Paris and Beijing has become. And it contrasts markedly with the tone of the exchanges between France and Taiwan.

In July 2018, then-Legislative Speaker Su Jia-chyuan visited Sweden, the United Kingdom, and France. “He was given a chance to speak at the French National Assembly,” François Wu Chih-chung, Representative of the Taiwan Bureau in Paris, told this author. “He spoke in the presence of French Minister of Labor Muriel Pénicaud. When he finished his speech, he was applauded by the floor for several minutes.”

In May 2021, the French Senate voted, by 304 votes for and 0 votes against, in favor of a statement affirming its support for Taiwan. Minister of Finance Bruno Le Maire said the French government was in step with the parliament’s position on Taiwan. According to Representative Wu, the outcome of the vote made it “obvious that Taiwan has started to be known by the French people.”

Bilateral trade between France and Taiwan has expanded steadily in recent years. In 2019, total trade reached 4.53 billion euros. French exports to Taiwan amounted to 1.8 billion euros (42th position), consisting primarily of mechanical equipment, electrical devices and electronic and computer-related products. In the same year, Taiwan exports to France came to 2.78 billion euros.

On July 21, 2021, Taiwan announced the opening of a representative



office in Vilnius, Lithuania, using the name *Bureau of Representation of Taiwan*. It was the first time the word “Taiwan” was used for a representative within the European Union, as the usual nomenclature is Bureau of Representation of Taipei, or variations on this theme. This is a significant difference that drew, as expected, an immediate angry reaction from the Chinese government. This is also a development that is sure to have been noted in France.

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**Editor’s Note:** The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the policy or the position of the Prospect Foundation.

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