

# Europe's Strategic Choices and Their Implications for Taiwan Under the Shadow of the Russo-Ukrainian War

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## **Abstract**

The Russo-Ukrainian War has significantly reshaped Europe's strategic landscape and presented the EU with crucial strategic choices pertaining to resource allocation and its competence framework. Crucially, Russian aggression has prompted EU member states to increase defense budgets and adjust fiscal policies amid rising security concerns. The war has also highlighted the strategic importance of addressing hybrid threats, leading to the EU's establishment of Hybrid Rapid Response Teams to counter cyber attacks, disinformation, and other non-conventional warfare tactics. Meanwhile, the EU's Strategic Compass for Security and Defense aims to enhance the bloc's capabilities by 2030, but challenges remain due to internal divisions and insufficient focus on threats from China. The EU's evolving security posture has implications for its relations with Taiwan, emphasizing the need for cooperation on hybrid warfare and democratic resilience amidst rising geopolitical tensions.

**Keywords:** European Union, Russo-Ukrainian War, Common Security and Defense Policy, European Parliament Elections, Taiwan-EU Relations

## **I. 'The Return of War to Europe': Strategic Challenges for the EU amid the Russo-Ukrainian War**

The full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine launched on February 24, 2022, sent shockwaves across Europe. The unprovoked and unjustified military aggression by the Russian Federation generated profound political, economic, and social shocks not only within Ukraine, but also throughout the continent.



**Figure 1. Ukrainian Military Operation in Eastern Ukraine**

Source: Ministry of Defense of Ukraine, “Anti-terrorist Operation in Eastern Ukraine,” August 13, 2014, *Wikimedia Commons*, <[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Anti-terrorist\\_operation\\_in\\_eastern\\_Ukraine\\_%28War\\_Ukraine%29\\_%2827843153986%29.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Anti-terrorist_operation_in_eastern_Ukraine_%28War_Ukraine%29_%2827843153986%29.jpg)>.

EU member states began to adjust their fiscal policies to ensure adequate resources for priority spending, including increasing defense budgets for domestic needs and to fulfill short-term commitments for military equipment for Ukraine. Poland, which shares a border with Ukraine, is due to spend 4.2 percent of GDP on defense in 2024, the highest in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), while on NATO’s eastern flank also far exceed or will soon surpass the 2 percent target, due to the growing perception of kinetic and non-kinetic threats on their borders. At the same time, new defense commitments are contentious and not always popular with voters, as many economies are already fiscally stretched in light of post-pandemic recovery, geopolitical tensions in other regions, and high-level inflation. Challenges arise also from demographic changes which are a product of Russian belligerence – on the one hand, the influx of Ukrainian refugees and, on the other hand, the continued

weaponization of irregular migration as a tool of hybrid warfare by Russia. Important questions also emerge with regard to the division of responsibility between actors in the design and implementation of security and defense policies. The lingering question concerns the degree to which countries are willing to rely on collective security arrangements, including identifying the role the EU could and should play as a security provider.

Any analysis of “European” policies requires a clear specification of the level of analysis – whether it operationalizes Europe as a metonymy for the European Union, or rather concerns itself with policies at the level of select member states. The policy responses to the Russo-Ukrainian conflict vary significantly across the member states.



**Figure 2. A Delegation of EU Experts on Disinformation and Media Literacy Participates in a Roundtable at the European Studies Institutes at Wenzao Ursuline University of Languages in Kaohsiung, Taiwan**

Source: Wenzao Ursuline University of Languages, “EU Expert Sharing on Disinformation and Media Literacy,” March 30, 2023, *Wenzao Ursuline University of Languages*, <<https://b001.wzu.edu.tw/b001article/53534>>.

Consequently, this paper explores the strategic challenges faced by the EU as a bloc amid the ongoing Russian invasion in Ukraine. It also identifies strategic choices which the Union can pursue to address these challenges through concrete policy actions, and analyzes how these dynamics can inform or alter relations between the EU and Taiwan.

## II. Hybrid Threats as a Key Challenge

The Russo-Ukrainian war is characterized by a high level of ongoing kinetic atrocities. This includes a purposeful terror campaign through infrastructure attacks on civilian facilities of little military value, such as kindergartens, health clinics, and cultural institutions. At the same time, Moscow's military aggression against Kyiv illustrates the change in terms of core facets of modern warfare which is increasingly defined by sophisticated hybridity.<sup>1</sup> The concept of hybrid warfare emphasizes the diversity of means deployed in the battlespace to achieve political objectives, including conventional methods and irregular tactics.<sup>2</sup> Ukraine continues to suffer from Russian cyberattacks and information operations. Lawfare also constitutes a key element of the Russian hybrid toolbox and a component of its broader disinformation and propaganda efforts.

The ongoing Russian hybrid warfare against Ukraine has spillover effects for the EU. The Kremlin actively seeks to undermine the democratic processes and institutions within the EU utilizing a combination of disinformation campaigns, cyberattacks, attacks on critical infrastructure, instrumentalized migration, and election interference. The strategic challenge of expanding hybrid threats which the EU faces presented the Union with a strategic choice regarding the method of addressing these forms of malign interference. In May 2024, the EU's General Affairs Council (GAC) decided to establish the EU Hybrid Rapid Response Teams (HRRT), initially announced in the EU's Strategic Compass. This development will result in tangible

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1. Arsalan Bilal, "Russia's Hybrid War against the West," April 26, 2024, *NATO Review*, <<https://www.nato.int/docu/review/articles/2024/04/26/russias-hybrid-war-against-the-west/index.html>>.
  2. Andrew Scobell, "China's Evolving Civil-Military Relations: Creeping Guojiahua," *Armed Forces and Society*, Vol. 31, No. 2, Winter 2005, pp. 227-244.

and ideational outcomes. Tangibly, HRRTs will be deployed on missions to member states, Common Security and Defence Policy missions and operations, and partner countries to provide tailored and targeted assistance through short-term assignments. It is also expected that the expansion of the EU Hybrid Toolbox, which HRRTs are a part of, and the institutionalization of the EU Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI) will be prominently featured in the EU's Strategic Agenda 2024-2029.

Examining the possible implications of the expanding framework of the EU to address hybrid threats, it is essential to recognize that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) military theorists broadly regard Russia as the most useful case study for implementing hybrid warfare because of the frequency it has used hybrid warfare against Ukraine but also in Africa and the Middle East.<sup>3</sup> The "Three Warfares" doctrine constitutes a form of hybrid warfare that entails legal, psychological, and media means. Taiwan has constituted the original target of the "Three Warfares" campaigns as Beijing has sought to instrumentalize political, ethnic, and socio-economic factions within the Taiwanese society, undermine the trust of the population in democratic processes and institutions and the U.S.-Taiwan alliance, and sway the public opinion to make it more amenable to the prospect of unification with the opposite side of the Taiwan Strait.<sup>4</sup> Amid the emergence of the authoritarian axis between Moscow and Beijing, there is evidence of cross-pollination between the two autocracies in terms of updating their respective hybrid warfare toolkits. Consequently, the EU should engage with Taiwan to pursue mutually beneficial exchanges regarding hybrid warfare. On the one hand, Taiwanese experts, with a profound understanding of Chinese non-conventional warfare techniques, could significantly expand the capabilities of HRRTs. On the other hand, as Taiwan lacks expertise for understanding Russian warfare, its experts could benefit from knowledge

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3. Nils Peterson, "The Chinese Communist Party's Theory of Hybrid Warfare," November 21, 2023, *Institute for the Study of War*, <<https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/chinese-communist-partys-theory-hybrid-warfare>>.

4. Michael Raska, "China and the 'Three Warfares,'" December 18, 2015, *The Diplomat*, <<https://thediplomat.com/2015/12/hybrid-warfare-with-chinese-characteristics-2/>>.



transfer from their European counterparts. Given the political sensitivities, including limitations resulting from the EU's non-recognition of Taiwan and the application of its "one China" policy, Taiwanese experts involved in these exchanges could be exclusively civilian and non-government affiliated.

### III. Strategic Compass for Security and Defense: Still Striving for Strategy?

In the EU, security and defense policy largely remain a competence of individual member states. At the same time, the Treaty of Lisbon, which entered into force on December 1, 2009, established the Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) with the objectives of cultivating a European strategic culture of security and defense, fostering cooperative responses to supranational conflicts and crises, enhancing the protections of the Union and its citizens, and facilitating the EU's external action aimed at bolstering international peace and security.<sup>5</sup> Significantly, the Treaty also expanded the competencies of the European Parliament, including those about the EU's external action, enabling the assembly to ascertain a full role in the development of the CSDP and effectively elevating its status as a key player in shaping the EU's external relations and addressing security challenges.<sup>6</sup>

Establishing the CSDP was a natural next step in deepening European integration, defined by increasing interdependence to achieve shared peace and prosperity. At the same time, the collective approach to security among the EU member states has remained amorphous. A sufficient degree of unity among member states and their willingness to delegate more responsibility about the design and implementation of security policy to Brussels-based institutions are necessary to collectively compete effectively in a world of increasing geopolitical competition. Whether these components have fully materialized remains subject to debate.

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5. European Parliament, "Fact Sheet: Common Security and Defence Policy," April 2024, *European Parliament*, <[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/ftu/pdf/en/FTU\\_5.1.2.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/ftu/pdf/en/FTU_5.1.2.pdf)>.

6. The role of the European Parliament and the impact of the 2024 European Parliament elections on the EU's strategic choices is further discussed in Chapter IV.



**Figure 3. Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission, and Charles Michel, President of the European Council, Visit Ukraine Amid the Russian Invasion**

Source: Dati Bendo, "Visit of Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission, to Ukraine," February 3, 2023, *European Commission Audiovisual Service*, <<https://audiovisual.ec.europa.eu/en/photo/P-060090~2F00-34>>.

In March 2022, the EU published the Strategic Compass for Security and Defense in recognition of the changing geopolitical landscape and the insufficiency of the existing tools for the EU to act as a capable security provider. The document lays out a plan of action for a more robust EU security and defense policy by 2030. Examining the Strategic Compass is critical for understanding the strategic choices that Europe is facing. This is particularly important in the context of the Russian aggression in Ukraine, as the document was significantly revised in the month immediately preceding its publication to reflect the heightened threat level amid the most significant kinetic conflict on the continent since World War II.



**Figure 4. Soldiers Carry the EU Flag Ahead of the First Plenary Session of the 2014-2019 European Parliament**

Source: European Parliament, “Soldiers carrying the EU flag,” June 30, 2014, *Flickr*, <[https://www.flickr.com/photos/european\\_parliament/14521113746/](https://www.flickr.com/photos/european_parliament/14521113746/)>.

EU policy experts repeatedly pointed out that the Strategic Compass is not a declaration of the EU’s grand strategy.<sup>7</sup> Instead, it serves two primary purposes. Firstly, it describes the operating environment and the first shared threat assessment in the history of the EU. Secondly, it lays down a roadmap for upgrading the part of

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7. Luigi Scazzieri, “Does the Strategic Compass Herald a Stronger EU in Security and Defence?” March 25, 2022, *Centre for European Reform*, <<https://www.cer.eu/insights/does-strategic-compass-herald-stronger-eu-security-and-defence>>; Amanda Paul, Jamie Shea, Mihai Sebastian Chihai, Ionela Ciolan, & Georg Riekes, “Will the Strategic Compass Be a Game-Changer for EU Security and Defence?” April 5, 2022, *European Policy Centre*, <<https://www.epc.eu/en/Publications/Will-the-Strategic-Compass-be-a-game-changer-for-EU-security-and-defen~479820>>.



the EU global strategy that focuses on security and defense. Concretely, the document enumerates four “baskets” of action, encompassing approximately 70 proposals for concrete measures where the EU will seek to expand its capabilities: (1) strengthening EU military and civilian operations (“Act”); (2) fostering resilience (“Secure”); (3) military capability development (“Invest”); and (4) strengthening external partnerships, including fostering effective division of labor with NATO (“Partner”).

At the same time, the document is not free from flaws. While the Strategic Compass constitutes an essential step towards enhancing the EU's ability to respond to threats of a diverse nature, two years since its publication, it remains to be seen whether the document is sufficient and operational. Internal fragmentation of the EU, differences in member states' and the union's strategic interests, and questions of credibility constitute vital challenges to successfully implementing the document.

The March 2024 report on the implementation of the Strategic Compass praises concrete achievements in all four baskets of action,<sup>8</sup> including notable progress in areas such as crisis management capacity, military mobility, maritime security, and space. However, this does not mean all concerns have been alleviated in the two years since the document's publication. In light of intra-bloc disagreements about the acceptable level of the EU's engagement in crisis management, next year will witness a crucial stress test for implementing the prescriptions of the Strategic Compass as the EU's Rapid Deployment Capacity<sup>9</sup> (RDC) is due to be ready by next year. An additional challenge related to the planned launch of RDC stems from the incomplete division of labor between the EU and NATO regarding security provisions. As many member states prioritize their engagement with NATO in their respective approaches

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8. European Union External Action, “2024 Progress Report on the Implementation of the Strategic Compass for Security and Defence,” March 18, 2024, *European Union External Action*, <[https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/2024-progress-report-implementation-strategic-compass-security-and-defence\\_en](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/2024-progress-report-implementation-strategic-compass-security-and-defence_en)>.

9. The Strategic Compass foresees the development of the Rapid Deployment Capacity by the EU, consisting of up to 5,000 troops, which could be deployed in non-permissive environments. Nevertheless, the document in its current shape does not define conditions for rapid deployment, exposing the EU's vulnerability to internal disagreements.

to collective defense, conflicts may arise if countries must commit their capabilities to both RDC and the NATO Response Force (NRF).

An additional challenge not addressed in the implementation report concerns the limited scope of the EU's action as a security provider. One of the most significant shortcomings of the Strategic Compass is its disproportionately brief treatment of challenges posed by the People's Republic of China (PRC), shying away from decisive language. It also fails to fully recognize the importance of the Indo-Pacific region, effectively characterizing the EU's security and defense remit as that of a regional — not a global — power.<sup>10</sup>

This is particularly troubling in light of Beijing's activities in the areas identified as emerging fields of international contestation: high seas freedom of navigation, access to outer space, and governance of the digital sphere. It ought to be borne in mind that Beijing enacted military reforms to more fully integrate cyberspace, space, and electronic warfare into joint military operations.<sup>11</sup>

Additionally, it fails to recognize the growing confluence of strategic interests between Moscow and Beijing. The Strategic Compass defines the Russian military aggression in Ukraine, which marked “the return of war in Europe,” as a “tectonic shift” in European history. At the same time, it is imperative to recognize that the “no limits partnership” announced by Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin effectively has enabled the Kremlin to continue its aggression against Ukraine, complicating the efforts of democratic states to isolate Russia and exclude it from the global economy.<sup>12</sup>

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10. Steven Blockmans, Dylan Macchiarini Crosson, & Zachary Paikin, “The EU's Strategic Compass: A Guide to Reverse Strategic Shrinkage?” *CEPS Policy Insights*, No. 2022-14, March 2022, CEPS, <[https://cdn.ceps.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/CEPS-PI2022-14\\_EU-Strategic-Compass.pdf](https://cdn.ceps.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/CEPS-PI2022-14_EU-Strategic-Compass.pdf)>.

11. Marcin Jerzewski, “The EU's Strategic Compass for Security and Defense: An Incomplete Roadmap?” *Prospects & Perspectives*, 2022 No. 26, May 5, 2022, *Prospect Foundation*, <<https://www.pf.org.tw/tw/pfch/13-8320.html>>.

12. Marcin Jerzewski, “Another ‘Dialogue of the Deaf’? Evaluating the 24th EU-China Summit,” *Prospects & Perspectives*, 2024 No. 7, February 1, 2024, *Prospect Foundation*, <<https://www.pf.org.tw/en/pfen/33-10549.html>>.



**Figure 5. Chinese Leader Xi Jinping Meets Russian President Vladimir Putin at the Official Welcoming Ceremony in the Grand Kremlin Palace in Moscow**

Source: Presidential Executive Office of Russia, “Russian-Chinese Talks,” March 21, 2022, *Presidential Executive Office of Russia*, <<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/70748>>.

Consequently, the view of security challenges presented in the Strategic Compass is myopic as it fails to address the emergence of the authoritarian axis of cooperation between Russia and China and to fully recognize the growing interconnectedness of the Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific theaters.

This state of affairs has important implications for Taiwan. The EU may have limited capacity to act outside of its immediate neighborhood as it continues to struggle with competing ideas for the future trajectory of European integration, internal disagreements regarding the scope of the EU action in the provision of security, and procedural questions about the operationalization of the newly proposed instruments, such as the RDC. This challenge is exacerbated by the insufficient consideration of the importance of the Indo-Pacific in the Strategic Compass, a critical roadmap for strengthening the EU's security toolkit.

While the Strategic Compass seeks to describe the tasks the EU should undertake to strengthen its capacity to act by 2030, the shortcomings described in the document need to be addressed promptly. There are three areas of action to achieve that. Firstly, the EU should broaden the scope of the collective threat assessment to recognize the expanding security challenges posed by China and its expansionary aspirations. A revised threat analysis is due for publication in 2025, and this exercise should pay closer attention to Chinese efforts to change the rules-based order, including its tacit support for Russia and its hybrid warfare against liberal democracies. To this end, it is also crucial to uphold the current approach of keeping Russia on the agenda in talks with China.<sup>13</sup> Secondly, the bloc ought to institutionalize its security and defense agenda. Concretely, including a dedicated defense portfolio (beyond industry considerations) in the next European Commission will be essential in expanding the EU's role as a credible security provider. Lastly, the EU should materially support its ambitions by prioritizing security and defense in the next (2028-2034) Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF).

#### **IV. 2024 European Parliament Elections and the Future of Europe's External Action**

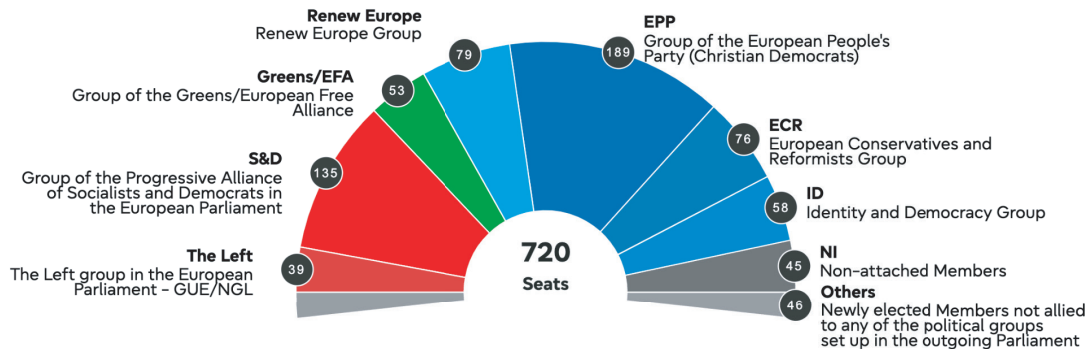
Between June 6-9, 2024, citizens of the EU elected the new European Parliament. The world's only supranational election is particularly consequential as the EU continues to look for consensus on actions addressing key challenges facing the block: the ongoing Russian military aggression against Ukraine, obstacles to post-pandemic recovery, growing concerns about irregular migration and weaponization of migration flows as a tool of hybrid warfare, and economic challenges ranging from rising inflation to ongoing supply chain disruptions.

At the time of submission of this article, only provisional results of the 2024 European Parliament elections are available. The allocation of the 720 seats to political groups remains subject to change, although Figure 6 effectively illustrates

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13. Justyna Szczudlik, "Why the EU Must Keep Talking with China about Russia," May 21, 2024, *China Observers*, <<https://chinaobservers.eu/why-the-eu-must-keep-talking-with-china-about-russia/>>.





**Figure 6. Provisional Results<sup>14</sup> of the 2024 European Parliament Elections (as of June 14, 2024)**

Source: European Parliament, “2024 European election results,” June 14, 2024, *European Parliament*, <<https://results.elections.europa.eu/>>.

the general trends. While the EU is not a homogenous entity and patterns of voting behavior vary across the member states, three main observations can be drawn from the preliminary results. Firstly, the results are not a harbinger of a political earthquake in Brussels. While the far-right, hardcore Euroskeptic parties made significant gains – including the astonishing performance of Marie Le Pen’s National Rally party in France, which received more than twice the votes of President Macron’s Renaissance – they still lack seats to potentially form a right-wing majority coalition with the center-right European People’s Party (EPP). What follows, even though their majority will have shrunk in comparison to the 2019-2024 EP term, the mainstream, pro-EU political groups will retain their influence during the next term of the European Parliament: the center-right EPP will remain the largest group in the parliament, followed by the center-left group Socialists and Democrats. Lastly, the voters punished two political groups known for their progressive, normative appeals: the liberals of Renew and the Greens, undermining the effects of the 2019 “Green wave” in Europe.

14. Composition of the European Parliament based on available provisional or final national results published after voting has finished in all Member States, based on the structure of the outgoing Parliament.

Additionally, it is essential to comment on the turnout. According to preliminary figures shared by the European Parliament, approximately 51 percent of eligible voters went to the polls in 2024. This average turnout rate is susceptible to outliers; namely, member states, where voting is compulsory.<sup>15</sup> While this aligns with previous European elections (in 2019, voter turnout was recorded at 50.66 percent) in many member states, the turnout in EP elections is significantly lower than in national polls, pointing to difficulties in mobilizing voters for supranational European politics.

When discussing the potential implications of the European elections on EU policies, it is essential to consider the institutional limitations of the European Parliament, the only directly elected body within the bloc. Notably, the EU is not a parliamentary democracy – the Parliament lacks the mandate to initiate new legislation. Its powers are limited to approving or rejecting a legislative proposal or proposing amendments to it; in the ordinary legislative procedure, the assembly stands on an equal footing with the Council of the European Union, whereas in particular legislative procedure, it only plays a consultative role.

At the same time, the outcome of the European Parliament elections is closely tied to the choice of the European Commission president employing the *Spitzenkandidat*<sup>16</sup> method. Employed since 2014, the process is a procedural response to the amendment of the Treaty on European Union Article 17.7, which introduced “taking into account the elections to the European Parliament”<sup>17</sup> as a part of the procedure for appointing the Commission president. The lead candidate of the European political party, who wins the highest number of votes in European

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15. Voting is compulsory in Belgium, Bulgaria, Greece, and Luxembourg.

16. German for “lead candidate.”

17. The revised (post-Lisbon) wording of the Article 17.7 of the Treaty on European Union: “Taking into account the elections to the European Parliament and after having held the appropriate consultations, the European Council, acting by a qualified majority, shall propose to the European Parliament a candidate for President of the Commission. This candidate shall be elected by the European Parliament by a majority of its component members. If he does not obtain the required majority, the European Council, acting by a qualified majority, shall within one month propose a new candidate who shall be elected by the European Parliament following the same procedure.”

elections or can secure a majority coalition, is proposed by the European Council to the Parliament for election to the Commission Presidency.<sup>18</sup> The *Spitzenkandidaten* process, which transgressed the pure intergovernmental mode of Commission president appointment, has amended executive-legislative relations within the EU as it empowered the President through the electoral mandate.<sup>19</sup> Consequently, the European Parliament elections also influence the makeup of the European Commission as the central executive body of the Union and the primary source of legislative proposals in the Union.

The results of the elections prompt three main questions regarding the trajectory of the EU over the next five years. Firstly, considering the low turnout rates, to what extent do the difficulties in voter mobilization reflect the challenges in fostering European unity underpinned by a shared European identity? Secondly, to what extent have the voters manifested their “Ukraine fatigue” through their support for Ukraine skeptics? Lastly, to what extent will Europe’s turn to the right render the EU policies more nationalist and inward-looking?

The contrast between turnout rates in European Parliament elections and national elections is quite pronounced in several member states. Poland serves as an illustrative example. In October 2023, Poland witnessed an unprecedented wave of voters mobilizing for a pro-democratic, pro-EU coalition of opposition parties, resulting in a turnout rate of 74.4 percent. Nevertheless, in the June 2024 European Parliament elections, the turnout rate was 40.7 percent, marking a decline of approximately five percentage points compared to the 2019 European elections. Political scientists have pointed out that EU citizens regard the European Parliament elections as “second-order elections,” implying that eligible voters do not perceive the assembly as having

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18. Matilde Ceron, Thomas Christiansen, & Dionyssi G. Dimitrakopoulos, *The Politicisation of the European Commission's Presidency: Spitzenkandidaten and Beyond* (London: Palgrave Macmillan Cham, 2024), pp. 1-367.

19. Sophia Russack, Dionyssi Dimitrakopoulos, Thomas Christiansen, & Matilde Ceron, “Is the EU’s Spitzenkandidaten Procedure Fit for the Future?” June 4, 2024, *Centre for European Policy Studies*, <<https://www.ceps.eu/ceps-publications/is-the-eus-spitzenkandidaten-procedure-fit-for-the-future/>>.

significant influence over their issues of concern.<sup>20</sup> The prioritization of the national problems and misperception of the importance of the European Parliament is also reflected in the language of the campaign, which largely ignores supra-national, pan-European topics such as the enlargement and institutional reform of the EU, including the expansion of its competence in the context of CSDP.<sup>21</sup> Low turnout in



**Figure 7. Riga Mayor Mārtiņš Staķis and the Ambassador of Ukraine to Latvia, Olexandr Mischenko, Raise the Ukrainian Flag at the Riga Town Hall as a Gesture of Latvian-Ukrainian Solidarity**

Source: Linus Folke Jensen, “Riga Town Hall Ukrainian flag raising 14 February 2022,” February 14, 2022, *Wikimedia Commons*, <[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Riga\\_Town\\_Hall\\_Ukrainian\\_flag\\_raising\\_14\\_February\\_2022\\_%285%29.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Riga_Town_Hall_Ukrainian_flag_raising_14_February_2022_%285%29.jpg)>.

20. Marcin Rulka, “Problem niskiej frekwencji w wyborach do Parlamentu Europejskiego – przyczyny i sposoby jej zwiększenia,” *Przegląd Politologiczny*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 2010, pp. 115-124; Cas Mudde, “The 2019 EU elections: Moving the center,” *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 30, No. 4, October 2019, pp. 20-34.

21. Cas Mudde, “The Far Right and the 2024 European Elections,” *Intereconomics: Review of European Economic Policy*, Vol. 59, No. 2, 2024, pp. 61-65.



the European Parliament is not necessarily correlated with attitudes toward European integration or poor progress towards adopting European identity by voters. Instead, it points to the perception that the decisions of the EU are too far removed from their daily lives. In a time of rising geopolitical tensions, this is particularly concerning as the disconnect between EU citizens and EU institutions may hinder progress on advancing a collective approach to European security led by the EU.

The support for Ukraine has been a crucial electoral issue during the most recent European Parliament elections. Two far-right parties that made significant gains in the assembly, the Alternative for Germany (AfD) and the National Rally (RN) in France, do not support dedicating more resources to supporting Ukraine amid its fight against Russian military aggression. To some extent, the signs of “Ukraine fatigue” demonstrated by European voters in the most recent elections may be read as a product of Russian malign influence on democratic institutions and processes in Europe, including using information operations. Věra Jourová, Vice President of the European Commission for Values and Transparency, asserted that ahead of the European Parliament elections, “There are three big countries under permanent attack (from Russia). And it’s France, Germany, and Poland”<sup>22</sup> – the far-right placed first, second, and third in the three countries, respectively. Many of the narratives perpetuated by pro-Kremlin actors sought to undermine the support for Ukraine and depict Ukrainian refugees as a “burden.” This fueled the right turn in Europe, as many extreme political establishments on the political right in Europe operate as de facto Russian proxies. For example, a delegation of AfD members of the Bavarian regional parliament traveled to Russia in March 2024 to observe the presidential elections and subsequently assessed the elections as open, democratic, and free in public statements.<sup>23</sup>

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22. “France, Germany, Poland facing ‘permanent’ Russian disinformation attacks: EU,” *The Japan Times*, June 5, 2024, <<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2024/06/05/world/politics/permanent-russian-disinformation-eu/>>.

23. European Parliament, “New allegations of Russian interference in the European Parliament, in the upcoming EU elections and the impact on the European Union,” April 25, 2024, *European Parliament*, <[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2024-0380\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2024-0380_EN.html)>.

It is essential to avoid exaggerating the effects of the quantitative gain in seats by the far right on relations between the EU and Ukraine: in the short and medium term, the backsliding regarding political, military, and financial support for Ukraine is unlikely. Firstly, member states still play a decisive role in making the relevant allocations. Secondly, the most recent review of the current MFF (2021-2027) paved the way for establishing the Ukraine Facility with an overall capacity of €50 billion for grants, loans, and guarantees. Nevertheless, some challenges may emerge when the negotiations for the next MFF commence.

These dynamics also highlight the importance of recognizing FIMI as one of the most pivotal challenges faced by the EU. This could pave the way for closer coordination with the Taiwanese government and civil society organizations with



**Figure 8. Then-President Tsai Ing-wen Meets with Seven Members of the Special Committee on Foreign Interference and Disinformation (INGE) During the First-Ever Official European Parliament Mission to Taiwan**

Source: Wang Yu Ching, "Then-President Tsai Ing-wen Meets with Seven Members of INGE," November 4, 2021, *Flickr*, <<https://www.flickr.com/photos/presidentialoffice/51654228505/>>.

robust experience addressing influence operations linked to pro-Chinese actors. The historic delegation of the Special Committee on Foreign Interference and Disinformation (INGE) to Taiwan laid the foundation for engagements in this field, which became the European Parliament's first-ever official visit to Taiwan. Evidence demonstrates that China and Russia are increasingly collaborating to spread disinformation, also against the EU, which both autocracies view as an actor constraining their interests.<sup>24</sup> Consequently, despite the limitations imposed by the EU's adherence to its one-China policy, Taiwan can leverage its experience in identifying, countering, and deterring Chinese information operations as a tool for deepening its engagements with the EU.

## V. Conclusion

Amid the Russo-Ukrainian war, the EU finds itself at a crossroads. Many of the challenges related to the EU's (in)ability to act in light of the strategic challenges it faces are related to a perpetual identity crisis – European decision-makers, which includes voters, struggle to find a single unitary direction for the ongoing process of European integration, raising questions about the acceptable scope of the EU's competences and member states' commitments to collective undertakings. This issue manifests itself also in the EU's policy documents, including the Strategic Compass, which fails to effectively define a grand strategy for the bloc. Additionally, as Russian military aggression against Ukraine generates spillover effects for the EU, the union continues to face hybrid attacks aimed at undermining its institutions and process as well as internal unity. Division and divergences also limit the ability of the EU to act as a global power. This necessitates decisive collective action to foster cohesion and a union which protects.

Within the context of the Taiwan-EU ties, Taipei and Brussels should embrace the popular adage – “crisis is an opportunity for change” (危機就是轉機). Due to the tacit collaboration between Moscow and Beijing, Taiwan and the EU should

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24. David Bandurski, “China and Russia are joining forces to spread disinformation,” March 11, 2022, *Brookings Institution*, <<https://www.brookings.edu/articles/china-and-russia-are-joining-forces-to-spread-disinformation/>>.

recognize each other as equal partners and engage in comparative threat assessments *auf Augenhöhe*. Recognizing the political sensitivities, this cooperation can occur outside of the government structures. Cooperation with the civil society can be highly conducive to the realization of strategic goals. While the EU currently prioritizes its economic interests in relations with Taiwan, the EU-Taiwan ties should be deepened with a new focus on its civil society, a fundamental building block of Taiwan's democratic resilience. This aligns with one of the EU's key strategic objectives: to uphold peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait. Research on democratic resilience demonstrates that the strength of civil society is statistically more significant than per capita income in explaining democratic success.<sup>25</sup> A robust civil society, which the EU could further engage and support, safeguards democratic institutions and processes, even amid constantly evolving techniques of malign authoritarian influence. As the EU seeks to strike a balance between maintaining its reputation as a normative power with a push to become a geopolitical actor driven by its interest, it should recognize its own agility and flexibility in shaping informal albeit substantial relations with Taiwan, a like-minded democratic partner.

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25. David Arase, "Democratic Development and Social Resilience in the Asia Pacific," May 2024, *Center for Asia-Pacific Resilience and Innovation*, <<https://caprifoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Arase-Working-Paper-Democratic-Development-and-Social-Resilience-2024.pdf>>.