

The 2024 European Parliament Elections and Their Impact on the EU's Foreign Policy

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Abstract

The 2024 European Parliament elections were not only a simple Europe-wide election but were also national referenda in some countries on their government's management of the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russo-Ukrainian war. The strong showing by far-right parties has shown that a great number of Europeans are now eager for more assertive leadership to help them get out from the muck of their daily life. The new legislature in the European Parliament has shifted to the right in the political spectrum, though this change will not have a significant impact on the EU's foreign policy. The EU should continue to insist on prioritizing the issue of climate change in its global agenda, and to intervene in humanitarian crises as it used to do in regional conflicts. Peace, stability, and prosperity will still be the core concerns of the EU's Indo-Pacific strategy — including maintenance of the *status quo* in the Taiwan Strait. Cooperation between Taiwan and like-minded European countries will continue to develop in many domains. Besides the ICT and semiconductor industries, newer forms of green energy and healthcare will also be key sectors. Additionally, the recent breakthrough of former president Tsai's visit to Europe is indicative of the extent to which relations have improved.

Keywords: European Parliament, EU Foreign Policy, Indo-Pacific Strategy, EU-Taiwan Relations, Democratic Values

I. The European Parliament's New Composition

The 2024 European Parliament elections were the first since Brexit in 2020. The total number of European Parliament members has been downsized from 751 to 720. The average voter turnout was 50.74%, about the same as in the previous election in

2019 (50.66%). The new composition of the European Parliament shows some notable changes compared to the previous legislature.

- European People's Party (EPP): The center-right group remains the largest with 188 seats, with a gain of 12 from the previous legislature.
- Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D): The second-largest group with 136 seats; lost three seats.
- Patriots for Europe (PfE): The newly formed far-right group, mainly comprising members of European Parliament from the French National Rally and Hungarian Fidesz, with 84 lawmakers from 12 countries.
- European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR): This center-right and soft Eurosceptic group gained nine seats, making it the fourth-largest bloc with 78 seats.
- Renew Europe: This centrist to center-right, pro-European group suffered the biggest losses, losing 25 seats; it now has 77.

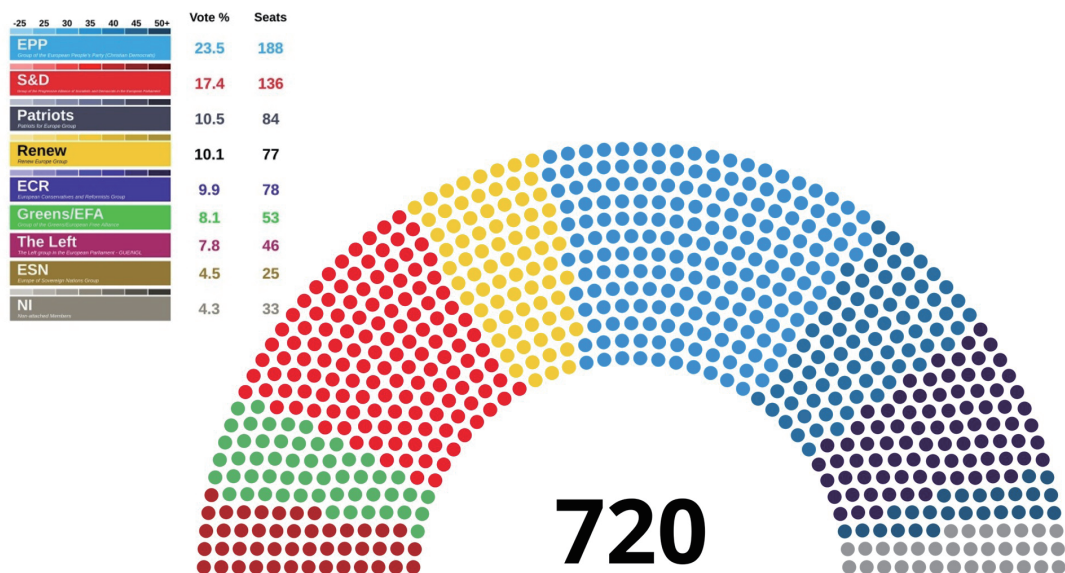


Figure 1. The New European Parliament

Source: Wikipedia, "2024 European Parliament election," July 16, 2024, *Wikipedia*, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2024_European_Parliament_election>.

- Greens/European Free Alliance (Greens/EFA): The Alliance also took a hit, losing 18 seats, and now has 53.
- Europe of Sovereign Nations (ESN): The newly formed far-right group has 25 seats from eight member states, including Germany's Alternative for Germany (AfD), alongside the PöE, giving Eurosceptics a louder voice.

In sum, there has been a shift to the right in the new legislature, with conservative and far-right groups gaining ground. This result reflects, to a certain degree, the dislocations the EU has experienced on multiple fronts since the outbreak of the Russo-Ukrainian war, and the consequences of this conflict, such as high inflation and the influx of refugees, have contributed to the triumph of far-right forces in many countries. Besides the European Parliament itself, we can now expect that in the coming years, far-right or populist parties could become the ruling parties in some European countries.

II. Possible Impact on the EU's Foreign Policy

The European Parliament has developed an important role in foreign policy over the years, including its role as a co-legislator in areas that fall under the EU's external actions, its voice regarding international agreements, and budgetary powers. The extension of its role in foreign policy, such as providing aid and managing migration in conflict zones, is expected to put additional pressure on the bloc.

Ursula von der Leyen's second term is, therefore, expected to face many challenges, including balancing the demands of different political factions and addressing criticism of her leadership style. The European Parliament's approval is crucial for her legislative agenda, and any shift in political alliances could have an impact on her ability to implement her policies effectively. Hence, while the European Parliament's support is essential for von der Leyen's second term, navigating its complex political landscape will be key to her success.

One possible scenario is that the new parliament could push for a more assertive and independent foreign policy, potentially challenging the EU's traditional alliances and partnerships. Moreover, with a more right-leaning assembly, the influence of



Figure 2. Ursula von der Leyen Will Lead the European Commission for a Second Five-Year Term

Source: European Parliament News, “Parliament re-elects Ursula von der Leyen as Commission President,” July 18, 2024, *European Parliament*, <<https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20240710IPR22812/parliament-re-elects-ursula-von-der-leyen-as-commission-president>>.

conservative and far-right groups has increased dramatically. The rise of populist right-wing parties means that there will be more resistance to ambitious climate policies and a stronger focus on EU members’ national sovereignty. This could also lead to a more cautious approach in areas like migration and international trade agreements. This shift could lead to changes in the EU’s stance on various issues and relations with other global powers, especially the traditional ties with the U.S.

Additionally, the new political landscape may affect the EU’s ability to implement the next phase of the European Green Deal and other foreign policy initiatives. However, the new European Parliament is expected to continue prioritizing climate change investments. The EU has set ambitious goals, including a 55%

reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 and achieving climate neutrality by 2050. To support these goals, at least 30% of the EU's €1.8 trillion long-term budget is dedicated to climate-related measures. Moreover, the InvestEU fund targets at least 30% of its investments towards climate objectives, and there are dedicated schemes like the Just Transition Fund to support regions most affected by the transition to a green economy. The EU will continue to position the climate change issue in the center to gain its leverage in international affairs.

III. EU Support for Ukraine

Alongside the global issues, geopolitical and security concerns remain the EU's top priority. The new European Parliament will continue its support for Ukraine, despite some internal differences among certain member states, such as Hungary, which constantly holds a more hostile position towards military assistance to



Figure 3. 2023 EU-Ukraine Summit in Kyiv

Source: European Commission, "2023 EU-Ukraine Summit," February 3, 2023, *Wikipedia*, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2023_EU%E2%80%93Ukraine_Summit>.

Ukraine. And even though there are some divisions within the European Parliament, particularly among leftist groups, about the extent and nature of military aid to Ukraine, there we can see some parties advocate for continued military support, while others call for negotiations and a different approach for resolving the conflict. Nevertheless, the EU has already agreed on a long-term solution for Ukraine's funding needs, including a €50 billion package for recovery and modernization from 2024 to 2027. This shows a strong commitment to supporting Ukraine in the face of Russia's aggression.

Politically, the European Parliament has passed several resolutions concerning Russia in recent years, focusing on various issues such as undemocratic practices, human rights violations, and the conflict in Ukraine.

- March 2022: The European Parliament adopted a resolution condemning Russia's invasion of Ukraine and calling for the immediate withdrawal of Russian forces.
- June 2022: A resolution was passed condemning Russia's actions in Ukraine and calling for stronger sanctions and support for Ukraine.
- December 2022: The Parliament passed a resolution supporting Ukraine and condemning Russia's aggression. This resolution also called for continued financial and military support for Ukraine.
- April 2024: The European Parliament passed a resolution condemning Russia's undemocratic presidential elections and their extension to occupied territories. The resolution criticized the lack of democratic processes and the illegitimate extension of Russian elections to regions under its control.

These resolutions reflect the European Parliament's strong stance against Russia's actions and its full support for democratic values and human rights.

Financially, European countries have provided substantial aid to support Ukraine:

- Total Aid: Between 2022 and 2024, Europe provided a total amount of 118.2 billion euros in aid to Ukraine.
- Important Contributors: Germany contributed the most, providing over 15 billion euros, followed by the UK, a non-EU member, with almost 14 billion euros.

- EU Institutions: European Union institutions, including the European Commission and the EU Council, provided over 39 billion euros in bilateral financial, humanitarian, and military aid.
- Types of Aid: The aid included financial support for economic stabilization, humanitarian assistance, and military aid.
- Macro-Financial Assistance: The EU has disbursed 18 billion euros under the Macro-Financial Assistance (MFA) program to help Ukraine stabilize its economy.
- Ukraine Facility: The EU has set up the Ukraine Facility, a dedicated instrument to provide up to 50 billion euros in stable and predictable financial support for the years 2024 to 2027.
- Frozen Russian Assets: The EU has generated funds from frozen Russian assets, with a recent loan of up to 35 billion euros approved by the European Parliament.
- European Peace Facility: The EU has allocated 5 billion euros under the European Peace Facility to support Ukraine militarily.

The Russo-Ukrainian war remains the biggest strategic and political challenge in the field of security for the EU. The recent engagement of North Korean soldiers on the battlefield has made the situation even more complicated. One cause for concern is the possibility that the evolving politico-military situation could turn into a war between blocs — Russian allies against Western countries. Such a scenario would inevitably complicate peace efforts.

IV. The EU's China Policy and Indo-Pacific Strategy

Due to the rise of populist parties on the right of the political spectrum, there will likely be a shift towards a more cautious and protectionist approach towards China. The new political landscape may lead to increased scrutiny of China's human rights record and a stronger stance on issues like trade imbalances and technological competition.

The EU's strategy towards China is expected to focus more on “de-risking” rather than “decoupling,” meaning the EU will aim to reduce its economic dependence on China without completely severing ties. This approach will likely involve measures to protect critical industries and ensure a level playing field for European businesses.

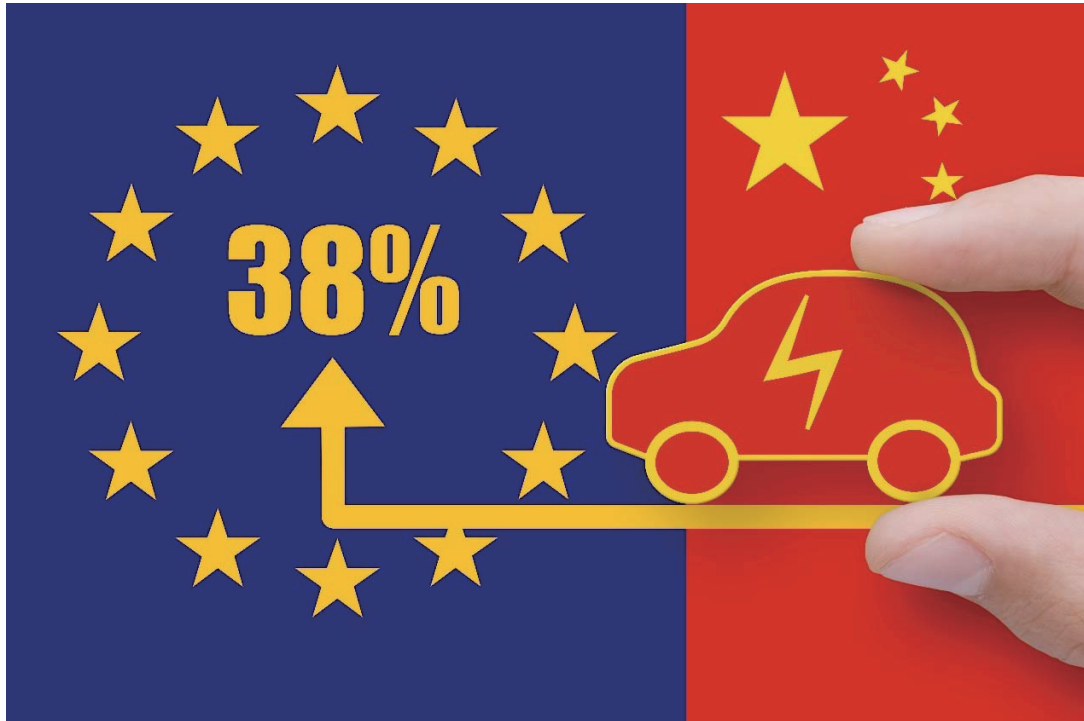


Figure 4. EU Shocks China with EV Duties of up to 38%

Source: Depositphotos.

The European Parliament adopted a resolution in September 2021 on a new EU-China strategy, emphasizing the need for a balanced approach to China, including concerns about human rights and Taiwan.

The European Union has since adopted several measures to de-risk its economic and strategic relations with China:

- **Tariffs on Chinese Import Goods:** The EU has imposed tariffs on certain Chinese imports, including electric vehicles, to protect its domestic industries from unfair competition.
- **Regulations on Sensitive Technologies:** The EU has introduced regulations to control the transfer of sensitive technologies, such as microelectronics, quantum computing, robotics, artificial intelligence, and biotech, to China.

- **Supply Chain Resilience:** The EU has implemented measures to mitigate strategic dependencies and vulnerabilities in supply chains, ensuring that critical materials and technologies are not overly reliant on China.
- **Trade Defense Instruments:** The EU has threatened to use trade defense instruments to counteract any unfair trade practices by China, such as dumping and subsidies.
- **Coordinated Approach:** The EU has coordinated its efforts with other like-minded partners, such as Japan, to manage economic relations with China and mitigate risks.

These measures are part of the EU's broader strategy to protect its economy, promote competitiveness, and partner with other countries to amplify its strengths while mitigating vulnerabilities.

The European Union's Indo-Pacific Strategy, unveiled in September 2021, aims to strengthen the EU's engagement with the region to promote peace, stability, and prosperity. It includes:

- **Promoting a Rules-Based Order:** The EU seeks to uphold international law, including the *UN Convention on the Law of the Sea* (UNCLOS), and supports freedom of navigation and overflight.
- **Strengthening Partnerships:** The EU aims to deepen its partnerships with Indo-Pacific countries, including through trade agreements, development cooperation, and security dialogues.
- **Enhancing Security Cooperation:** The EU is committed to enhancing its security cooperation with Indo-Pacific countries, including through joint military exercises, capacity-building, and maritime security initiatives.
- **Addressing Global Challenges:** The strategy emphasizes collaboration on global challenges, such as climate change, biodiversity, and health security.
- **Supporting Sustainable Development:** The EU aims to support sustainable development in the region, including through investments in infrastructure, digital connectivity, and green energy.



Figure 5. The French Navy's Frigate Prairial

Source: PentaPrune, "Prairial during RIMPAC 2016," July 28, 2016, *Wikipedia*, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/French_frigate_Prairial>.

The new European Parliament should continue supporting the EU's Indo-Pacific strategy, which aims to enhance cooperation in areas such as ocean governance, research and technology, connectivity, health, and tackling global challenges like climate change. The strategy also focuses on strengthening regional organizations and intensifying cooperation in multilateral fora.

While the core objectives of the strategy are expected to remain unchanged, the new composition of the Parliament might influence the approach and emphasis on certain aspects. For example, there could be more focus on security and defense cooperation, given the growing strategic importance of the Indo-Pacific region and the increasing assertiveness of China.

In recent years, there have been several notable transits of European naval ships through the Taiwan Strait and in the neighboring waters to ensure freedom of navigation and overflight in the region.

- October 2024: The French Navy's frigate *Prairial* transited the Taiwan Strait, following similar passages U.S. and Canadian ships. This was part of France's increased naval activity in the Indo-Pacific region.
- September 2024: Two German Navy ships, the frigate *Baden-Württemberg* and the supply ship *Frankfurt am Main*, passed through the Taiwan Strait for the first time in 22 years. This transit was part of their deployment from South Korea to Indonesia.



Figure 6. The German Navy's Frigate Baden-Württemberg

Source: Ein Dahmer, "Baden-Württemberg-class frigate," May 21, 2017, *Wikipedia*, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baden-W%C3%BCrttemberg-class_frigate>.

- June 2024: The Italian aircraft carrier ITS *Cavour* embarked on a significant deployment to the Indo-Pacific region. This five-month cruise aims to strengthen international cooperation and maritime security. The *Cavour*, along with the frigate ITS *Alpino*, forms the core of the Italian Carrier Strike Group (CSG). During its deployment, the CSG participated in various exercises, such as the Royal Australian Air Force's Pitch Black exercise and live-firing drills near Guam.

- May 2024: The *Zr. Ms. Tromp*, a De Zeven Provinciën-class frigate of the Royal Netherlands Navy performed a voyage to the Indo-Pacific after completing operations in the Red Sea. The ship participated in various exercises and operations with allies and partners in the region, promoting freedom of navigation and security.
- April 2024: The French frigate *Vendémiaire* participated in the Philippines-hosted Balikatan military exercise and visited Puerto Princesa on Palawan Island.
- In March 2024: The HMS *Spey*, a British Royal Navy offshore patrol vessel, transited the Taiwan Strait from the South China Sea. This passage was part of its routine deployment in the Indo-Pacific region, aimed at ensuring maritime security and freedom of navigation.

These passages underscore growing international concerns over stability in the Taiwan Strait and the commitment of European countries to uphold international navigation rights.

V. European Support for Taiwan

The EU continues to adhere to a “one China” policy, recognizing the People’s Republic of China as the sole legitimate government of China and not maintaining official diplomatic ties with Taiwan. However, the EU shares common interests and values with Taiwan, such as democracy, rule of law, and human rights. The EU also supports Taiwan’s meaningful participation in international bodies and opposes any unilateral changes to the *status quo* in the Taiwan Strait. This nuanced approach suggests that while the core policy may remain unchanged, the EU’s stance on related issues could become more assertive.

Geopolitically, the Taiwan Strait is of significant importance to the European Union for the following reasons:

- Economic Interests: Taiwan is a major player in the global semiconductor industry, which is crucial for European technology and manufacturing sectors. Disruptions in the Taiwan Strait could severely impact supply chains and economic stability in Europe.

- **Security Concerns:** The EU has a vested interest in maintaining peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific region. Any conflict or escalation in the Taiwan Strait could have global repercussions, affecting international trade routes and security dynamics.
- **Strategic Partnerships:** The EU and Taiwan share common values, such as democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. Strengthening ties with Taiwan aligns with the EU's broader strategy of promoting a rules-based international order.
- **Regional Stability:** The EU supports the *status quo* and the peaceful resolution of differences across the Taiwan Strait. Ensuring stability in the region is essential for the EU's broader geopolitical interests and its relationships with other Indo-Pacific countries.

The new European Parliament is expected to maintain the EU's "one China" policy. Meanwhile, the new political configuration in the European Parliament may lead to increased scrutiny of China's actions around Taiwan and a stronger stance on maintaining peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait. The EU is also likely to continue engaging with Taiwan on trade and investment, as well as other policy areas.

In recent years, the European Parliament has passed several resolutions concerning Taiwan, reflecting growing concerns over China's coercive actions against Taiwan, which undermine the peace and stability in the region.

- **September 2021:** The European Parliament adopted a resolution on a new EU-China strategy, emphasizing the need for a balanced approach to China, including concerns about human rights and Taiwan.
- **June 2022:** A resolution was passed on the security challenges in the Indo-Pacific, highlighting the strategic importance of the Taiwan Strait for regional and global security.
- **September 2022:** The Parliament addressed the situation in the Taiwan Strait, condemning China's military provocations and calling for a peaceful resolution of cross-Strait tensions.



Figure 7. EP Plenary Session-Voting Session

Source: Daina Le Lardic, “EP Plenary session - Voting session,” October 23, 2024, *European Parliament*, <https://multimedia.europarl.europa.eu/en/photo/ep-plenary-session-voting-session_20241023_EP-174102B_DLL_057>.

- December 2023: A resolution focused on EU-Taiwan trade and investment relations, praising Taiwan’s democracy and civil society, and calling for deeper cooperation.
- October 2024: The most recent resolution, 2024/2891(RSP), adopted on October 24 and titled “Resolution on the Misinterpretation of UN Resolution 2758 by the People’s Republic of China and its Continuous Military Provocations around Taiwan” condemned China’s use of UN Resolution 2758 to exclude Taiwan from international organizations and called for Taiwan’s meaningful participation in global bodies. This resolution was adopted overwhelmingly by 432 votes in favor, 60 against, and 71 abstentions. This is a significant part of international coordination and support of like-minded countries to help Taiwan in tackling China’s bullying in the international arena.

These resolutions collectively underscore the European Parliament's support for Taiwan's democratic values and its opposition to any unilateral changes to the *status quo* in the Taiwan Strait. That support for Taiwan is expected to continue under the new Parliament.

VI. EU Cooperation with Taiwan

Even though Europe and Taiwan do not have official diplomatic ties, bilateral relations between the two partners, based on the shared common values between democracies, are nevertheless strengthening. Europe and Taiwan have cooperated in



Figure 8. Taiwan and Germany Sign the First Scientific and Technological Cooperation Arrangement

Source: National Science and Technology Council, Taiwan, R.O.C., “A Historic Milestone in Taiwan-Germany Cooperation! First German Minister Visits Taiwan in 26 Years to Sign a Cooperation Arrangement with the NSTC,” March 21, 2023, *National Science and Technology Council, Taiwan, R.O.C.*, <<https://www.nstc.gov.tw/folksonomy/detail/6bc0f076-9685-4e92-857c-8b95a91edc42?l=en>>.

several domains for decades, including science and technology, business and trade, and public health.

Europe and Taiwan have been actively collaborating in the fields of high tech and science, focusing on several key areas:

- **Semiconductors:** Given Taiwan's leadership in semiconductor manufacturing, European countries have been keen to collaborate on research and development in this sector. For instance, Germany and Taiwan signed a Scientific and Technological Cooperation Arrangement (STA) to enhance cooperation in semiconductors, hydrogen, batteries, and AI.
- **Life Sciences:** The European Molecular Biology Organization (EMBO) and Taiwan's National Science and Technology Council (NSTC) have enhanced their cooperation, allowing researchers from both regions to participate in joint programs, fellowships, and scientific exchanges.
- **Material Sciences and Biotechnology:** Countries such as the Czech Republic have partnered with Taiwan on projects related to material sciences, smart agriculture, biotechnology, and information security.
- **Artificial Intelligence:** Taiwan has been working with the UN's International Research Center on Artificial Intelligence in Slovenia, with support from the NSTC.
- **Pandemic Prevention and Precision Health:** Taiwan's initiatives in these areas have attracted European interest, leading to collaborative projects and knowledge exchange.

These collaborations highlight the strong partnership between Europe and Taiwan in advancing technological innovation and scientific research.

Europe and Taiwan also have a robust business relationship, characterized by strong trade ties and cooperation in various sectors.

- **Trade Relations:** Taiwan is the EU's 13th-largest trading partner, with bilateral trade in goods reaching 77.7 billion euros in 2023. The EU is Taiwan's fourth-largest trading partner, after China, the U.S., and Japan.

- **Investment:** The EU is Taiwan's largest foreign investor, with significant investments in sectors like semiconductors, information and communication technology, and green energy.
- **Sectoral Cooperation:** The EU and Taiwan hold annual bilateral trade consultations and sectoral working groups focusing on areas such as offshore wind, digital trade, and agri-food.
- **Innovation and Technology:** Both partners collaborate on innovations in sectors like artificial intelligence, smart mobility, and green energy, offering numerous business opportunities for companies from both sides.

This level of cooperation and partnerships between Europe and Taiwan should continue to flourish and deepen in the coming years.

VII. Conclusion

The European Parliament does not possess the powers and checks and balances that characterize national parliaments, and for a long time it has been criticized for being a mere political forum. Nevertheless, the European Parliament has repeatedly demonstrated its spirit of *idealtolitik* rather than *realpolitik*, and it continues to emphasize universal values on international issues. In the new legislature, the shift to the right could cause certain divisions on domestic affairs, but on foreign policy and global issues, no significant changes are expected.

Former President Tsai Ing-wen's recent European tour has set a new precedent in Taiwan's diplomatic playbook. During her nine-day trip, Tsai met with key European leaders and participated in significant events, such as Forum 2000 in Prague and a visit to the European Parliament in Brussels. The tour highlighted the growing international stature of Taiwan and reinforced its diplomatic bonds with European countries. This breakthrough shows that the European Parliament is indeed a true ally of Taiwan.



Figure 9. Former President Tsai Ing-wen Visits Europe

Source: Tsai Ing-wen, “Former President Tsai Ing-wen came to Brussels, Belgium,” October 17, 2024, *Facebook*, <<https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=1106972270780020&set=pcb.1106967750780472>>.