

Becoming Engaged? The European Union and Cross-Strait Relations

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At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the Taiwan Strait remains to be a "hot-spot" in international affairs, as military conflict between the Republic of China and the PRC with the potential to spiral up into full-scale war cannot be ruled out. Although economic integration and cultural-scientific exchange between the two sides are intensifying, the stalemate concerning the issue of Taiwanese sovereignty has so far precluded any substantial political rapprochement between Taipei and Beijing. New initiatives have to be promoted to bring the two sides back to the negotiating table. This paper argues that for various reasons the European Union is in a better position to assume the role of a mediating third party than, for instance, the United States. Accepting such a role, the EU should advocate economic and subsequent political integration between Taiwan and the mainland along the lines of its own historical experience and actual undertakings. Such an approach has certainly to take issue with the one-China principle as currently defined by the PRC, since no enduring peace can be brought to the Taiwan Strait without a guarantee of substantial Taiwanese sovereignty. Under the conditions of conceptual coherence and a basic consensus of the EU member states on conflict intervention in the Asia-Pacific, this paper argues for a more active European engagement to deal with the "Taiwan question".

I Introduction: Setting the Tone for Europe's Engagement in the Cross-Strait Conflict

The EU supports the peaceful resolution of differences between Taiwan and the mainland, and believes that the gradual integration of both economies into the world trading system will contribute to this goal.¹

The European Parliament recommends that the political pillar of the ASEM process should include a comprehensive approach on conflict prevention and peace keeping, e.g., supporting political dialogue between North and South Korea, as well as between the People's Republic of China and Taiwan on the question of Taiwan; and urges the Commission to propose that a dialogue be started within ASEM on security matters with a view to defining conflict prevention mechanisms.²

It is established wisdom that the so-called Taiwan question is one of the most complicated security issues in the Asia-Pacific. Although there are currently no signs

¹ European Commission, "External Relations: The EU's Relations with Taiwan (Chinese Taipei)," at <http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/taiwan/intro.html, 06/09/2001> (last update).

² European Parliament resolution on the Commission Communication on Europe and Asia: *A Strategic Framework for Enhanced Partnership*, September 5, 2002, Document P5_TA-PROV (2002)0408.