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MISSION REPORT

following the mission to Taipei (Taiwan) from 3 to 5 November 2021

Special Committee on Foreign Interference in all Democratic Processes in the European Union, including Disinformation

Members of the mission:

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Introduction

Taiwan is considered to be at the front line of the manipulation of information and aggressive interference orchestrated by the Chinese State, and is often seen as a testing ground for how China will operate elsewhere.

In order to learn from Taiwan's experiences in dealing with these issues, the European Parliament's Special Committee on Foreign Interference in all Democratic Processes in the European Union, including Disinformation (INGE), requested that a delegation be sent to Taipei between 3 and 5 November 2021. This request was authorised on 30 September 2021 by the Conference of Presidents, with the mission becoming the European Parliament's first ever official visit to Taiwan.

In addition to the core purpose of the mission – exchanging best practices on how to address the external destabilisation of democratic processes – the special committee delegation also conveyed messages of solidarity and gratitude to Taiwan in line with the report adopted in plenary on 21 October 2021¹. Indeed, the adoption of this recommendation just two weeks before the mission garnered major media coverage in Taiwan and served as a good basis for the visit.

The delegation was received at the highest level by the Taiwanese authorities, including President Tsai Ing-wen, the Premier of the Executive Yuan (Prime Minister) Su Tseng-chang, and the President of the Legislative Yuan (Taiwanese Parliament) You Si-kun.

In the light of the COVID-19 pandemic, the delegation observed highly strict safety measures throughout the duration of its visit, including when travelling.

Summary account of the topics discussed during the visit:

- **Unprecedented destabilisation operations against Taiwan since 2018**

Ahead of the 2018 local elections, Taiwan found itself the target of intense hybrid attacks, including many information manipulation activities. These operations have been attributed to the Chinese State and are seen as an attempt to destabilise the current government.

These were the first in a long series of operations. An increasing number of sophisticated acts of hybrid aggression by China against Taiwan have been identified since then, and have come to a head on critical occasions, such as the 2020 presidential elections and the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The campaigns were mostly aimed at promoting Beijing narratives, which revolve around reunification, the Chinese army, anti-US sentiment, distrust in the Taiwanese Government, and discrediting anti-China voices.

The perpetrators of these campaigns have exploited the liberal media environment in Taiwan, which is commercial and largely dependent on advertising – no Taiwanese media outlet is wholly dependent on public funding. They have also benefited from the fact that the citizens of

¹ [European Parliament recommendation to the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy on EU-Taiwan political relations and cooperation.](#)

Taiwan and the People's Republic of China speak the same language.

The delegation was provided with some concrete examples during its visit, such as China's use of influencers to spread pro-China messages on TikTok and YouTube, or Chinese proxies manipulating information in private groups on messaging apps like WhatsApp or LINE, on topics such as culture, sport and foreign policy.

Beijing's interference can also take a myriad of forms, such as investments in strategic companies, talent pushing, the financing of political activities, and the use of religious institutions and groups, to name but a few.

- **Taiwan's multifaceted response to the manipulation of information**

Following the experiences of 2018, the Taiwanese President decided to launch some innovative tools to protect Taiwanese democracy without curtailing freedom of expression or freedom of the media. These efforts resulted in what is referred to as the 'Taiwanese model', which distinguishes itself for the extent to which the whole of society is involved and for its ability to protect democratic principles.

One of these tools includes the establishment by the Taiwanese Premier, Su Tseng-chang, of an anti-disinformation mechanism – a task force based on various levels of cooperation and partnerships which relies heavily on the expertise of civil society organisations.

Chaired by the government minister and spokesperson Lo Ping-cheng, the task force brings together representatives across different areas of government, including education, cybersecurity, digital, the Central Election Commission, equipment and procurement, with the aim of coordinating action across all departments.

During a roundtable with the delegation and the representatives of different agencies, Minister Lo delineated the following objectives for the task force:

1. Identifying disinformation through media literacy, including school and university programmes and training for teachers² and civil servants³ in order to improve the ability of citizens to make independent judgements;
2. Debunking disinformation through the release of accurate information ('clarification') as soon as the use of disinformation is detected, based on third-party checks and focusing on timeliness, accuracy and efficiency (including the use of humour)⁴;
3. Curbing the spread of disinformation by strengthening coordination between the public and private sectors and through the use of legal tools and technology⁵;

² In particular through the Media Literacy Education Promotion Committee, established by the Ministry of Education of Taiwan on 1 May 2019. This also includes public funding for schools, public libraries and the National Education Radio station to incorporate media literacy courses, materials and production.

³ Training programmes designed to enhance civil servants' ability to counter disinformation are developed by the Civil Service Development Institute of the government's Directorate-General of Personnel Administration.

⁴ Press releases clarifying anything that is found to be erroneous or false are put out by the government and other organisations within four hours of manipulated information being detected; press releases are also posted on the Real-Time News Clarification page of the organisation's website.

⁵ At the initiative of the National Communications Commission – the supervisory authority overseeing Taiwan's

4. Punishing the perpetrators without disrupting the balance between security and freedom of expression, the latter of which should under no circumstances be infringed. Unlike in Singapore, there is no single law to combat disinformation in Taiwan, but select additions to different sectoral laws⁶.

In order to accomplish its missions, the task force relies on close partnerships between civil society organisations with specialist expertise in fact checking and media literacy – which happen to be very active in Taiwan – and the private sector, such as the media and online platforms.

Our Taiwanese counterparts highlighted several projects that are run by civil society organisations and financed by private companies, including the following:

- in collaboration with four of the biggest Taiwanese fact-checking organisations, the LINE messaging app, which is widely used in Taiwan, has developed a ‘clarification’ mechanism to alert its users when a disinformation campaign is detected⁷;
- in September 2021, Google announced a donation of USD 1 million for Taiwan FactCheck Center as part of its Intelligent Taiwan initiative, with the aim of funding workshops for older people, people in remote areas, indigenous groups and newly naturalised citizens;
- Facebook, which had already been working with Taiwan FactCheck Center, has extended its partnership with MyGoPen to evaluate its content.

It is interesting to note that Taiwanese civil society organisations are not directly funded with public money – this was confirmed at a working lunch with representatives of Taiwanese NGOs⁸ and European think tanks based in Taipei⁹.

Their activities are either financed privately or are not financed at all and depend on the work of volunteers in order to safeguard their independence from the government in a highly polarised political environment. According to our Taiwanese counterparts, platforms are interested in forging partnerships with NGOs because they help people to use their services better.

Overall, a large part of the work on disinformation in Taiwan is undertaken by civil society organisations with recognised expertise in fact checking and media literacy. Preliminary

broadcast media – a draft bill (the Digital Communications Act) has been submitted to the Legislative Yuan (Taiwanese Parliament) in order to clarify the legal responsibilities of service providers for their users’ infringements.

⁶ Despite the creation of a legal system (2018-2019) for combating disinformation through amendments to existing sectoral laws and to Articles 251 and 313 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of China and Article 72 of the Criminal Code of the Armed Forces, no sanctions have been taken so far as the Taiwanese authorities have been reluctant to use them.

⁷ As part of the Digital Accountability Project established by LINE in July 2019 in conjunction with the governmental task force, a fact-checking chatbot has been developed to allow users to submit links or statements to be analysed against content previously fact-checked by one of the four NGOs – Taiwan FactCheck Center, Rumor & Truth, MyGoPen and Cofacts.

⁸ Including DoubleThink, Taiwan FactCheck Center, Fake News Cleaner, MyGoPen and the Association for Quality Journalism.

⁹ European Values Center for Security Policy and Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom.

findings over the last three years tend to demonstrate that the system works. With this in mind, Taiwanese NGOs and European think tanks, which the INGE delegation met with in Taipei, are advocating the establishment of an EU strategic communications hub in Taipei to bring together specialist expertise on disinformation issues and keep track of activities. They are also advocating closer cooperation on research and fellowships between the EU and Taiwan.

Moreover, the particular need to work and cooperate with platforms was singled out by Mr Lo, who emphasised the self-regulatory principles on false information agreed between the Taipei Computer Association and the five major internet platforms in Taiwan (Facebook, Google, LINE, Yahoo and Professional Technology Temple).

Similarly, Taiwan's Digital Minister, Audrey Tang, suggested that Taiwan remains quite reluctant to use coercive tools. Nevertheless, she recognised that Taiwan is still exploring the best ways to deal with these issues, and will follow forthcoming EU legislation on the matter with great interest, including the Digital Markets Act and Digital Services Act. Ms Tang also introduced the Taiwanese 'notice and public notice' system and other instruments of participatory democracy.

The meeting with Taiwanese parliamentarians from the Legislative Yuan also provided a good opportunity to compare Taiwanese and European approaches on how to regulate online platforms.

- **Safeguarding elections from external interference**

One of the main priorities of the Taiwanese authorities' efforts to crack down on the manipulation of information is to safeguard elections and referendums.

In particular, close links have been established between Taiwan's Central Election Commission and online platforms such as Facebook and Google in order to improve the detection of the manipulation of information during election campaigns.

Moreover, legal requirements have been introduced to Taiwanese legislation in order to eradicate political funding from external sources.

Adopted just a couple of days before the presidential elections in January 2020 – which would see President Tsai elected for another term – the Anti-Infiltration Act forbids any organisation or individual sponsored by foreign powers from providing political contributions, campaigning, lobbying or disseminating fake news designed to interfere with elections.

The new law aims to protect Taiwanese democracy and curb interference from Beijing without infringing on personal and political freedoms. It targets political donations and lobbying during electoral campaigns, with anyone in breach of it facing up to five years in prison and a fine of up to TWD 10 million, or USD 332 810.

However, significant aspects of the new legislation, including transparency requirements and an extension of powers of the registration authority, are yet to be adopted by the Legislative Yuan (Taiwanese Parliament).

A number of legislators had proposed more comprehensive legislation that would require state-

sponsored actors to register as foreign agents, as is the case in the US or Australia¹⁰.

- **The extent of Chinese interference in Taiwan**

During a meeting with the National Security Council, the magnitude and multifaceted nature of Chinese interference in Taiwan was exposed in some detail.

Several bodies were mentioned that are responsible for carrying out the manipulation of information and other hybrid operations in Taiwan and other democracies. These are also often tasked with conducting ‘stability’ operations in China.

Affiliated organisations of the Chinese Communist Party and the United Front, such as the Communist Youth League of China (50 million members), the 50 Cent Party (approximately 300 000 members) or the Little Pink, are particularly active in spreading pro-China messages as well as harassing independent journalists or political opponents on the internet, both within and outside China.

Their activities are additional to those of myriad other bodies, including strategic organisations such as the strategic unit of the People’s Liberation Army, the Chinese Communist Party propaganda department, or the Taiwan Affairs Office.

Bearing in mind Taiwan’s efforts to maintain the inclusiveness of its democratic society, which is highly divided on the question of Chinese identity, China is learning from Russian tactics in exploiting divisions in democratic societies by using minorities, for example in the Baltic States.

Another area of concern is how China has used its economic leverage to infiltrate Taiwanese television and print media and exploited Taiwan’s considerable degree of press freedom and competitive media environment to spread disinformation and influence public opinion with pro-China messages.

- **Protecting critical Taiwanese entities**

On the issue of foreign investment in critical sectors, Taiwan was a forerunner to the US and Europe in moving to protect its critical entities and technologies from Chinese investments. According to Minister Lo, its public procurement procedures in 5G and telecoms proscribe Chinese brands like Huawei, instead preferring Nokia and Ericsson. Nevertheless, the protection of Taiwan’s critical sectors does not prevent trade and investment across the strait.

There are, however, some loopholes that require further attention, not least when it comes to Hong Kong, which should be analysed carefully for the potential risk of Chinese proxies. Minister Lo pointed out that all Chinese entities are obliged to collaborate with the Chinese State.

- **Taiwan’s foreign investments**

Although the issue of Taiwanese foreign investment does not fall within the remit of the special

¹⁰ The Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA) and Foreign Influence Transparency Scheme (FITS), respectively.

committee, it was broached at the initiative of our Taiwanese counterparts, including during meetings with the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs, Harry Tseng Hou-jen, and the Deputy Trade Representative, Yang Jen-ni.

Both explained how the Taiwanese authorities are seeking to encourage the diversification of Taiwanese foreign investments that are still mainly located on mainland China. They underscored the fact that while Taiwan is the primary foreign investor in China, it wishes to become less dependent on the country.

Moreover, the issue of EU-Taiwan economic ties was raised with particular focus on the imbalance of bilateral relations: while the EU is the largest foreign investor in Taiwan, Taiwanese investments in the EU are rather limited. Our Taiwanese counterparts mentioned the fragmentation of the European market and insisted on the benefits of an EU-Taiwan bilateral investment agreement. During a presentation on Taiwan's New Southbound Policy, European business representatives also advocated more people-to-people exchanges in the area of tertiary and vocational education.

- **International cooperation**

During a public session with the delegation, President Tsai highlighted the need for the EU to join the Global Cooperation and Training Framework (GCTF), an international forum for cooperation on capacity-building and training programmes for third countries around the world. She insisted that the group should be open to countries beyond Asia and made mention of the first ever GCTF meeting held in Europe (Czechia), in September 2021, which was dedicated to the current challenges involving the global supply chain, including semiconductors.

The delegation also met with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Joseph Wu, and exchanged views on various topics, including Taiwan's participation in the Summit of Democracies to be hosted by US President Biden on 9 and 10 December. He also welcomed the reference to Taiwan in the joint communication on the EU's Indo-Pacific strategy¹¹ and called for the launch of negotiations on an EU-Taiwan bilateral investment agreement.

Conclusions

INGE's first ever mission outside the EU, which was also the European Parliament's inaugural mission to Taiwan, was a resounding success – not only for the substantial media coverage it attracted before and after the visit, but also for the quality of exchanges and intensity of the programme.

This mission also enabled MEPs to establish personal contacts with their Taiwanese counterparts, civil society representatives, and the European Economic and Trade Office in Taipei for future meetings and exchanges.

Last but not least, the mission's findings will feed into the INGE report, which is due to be adopted in January 2022.

¹¹ [Joint communication from the Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy of 16 September 2021 on the EU strategy for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific.](#)

**Programme for the Visit of the
Delegation of the European Parliament Special Committee on Foreign
Interference in all Democratic Processes in the European Union, including
Disinformation (INGE), to the Republic of China (Taiwan)
3-5 November 2021**

Wednesday, 3 November 2021

- 07:00 The delegation arrives at Taiwan Taoyuan International Airport
- 11:00 Meeting with H.E. Dr Chiu Tai-San, Minister of the Mainland Affairs Council
- 12:30 Working lunch with representatives of Taiwanese and European NGOs and think tanks
- 14:30 Meeting with Filip Grzegorzewski, Head of the European Economic and Trade Office in Taiwan, and heads of mission of the EU Member States
- 16:30 Meeting with H.E. Su Tseng-chang, Premier of the Executive Yuan
- 18:00 Working dinner with H.E. Dr Harry Tseng Hou-jen, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs

Thursday, 4 November 2021

- 09:30 Audience with President Tsai Ing-wen
- 11:00 Meeting with the National Security Council
- 12:30 Lunch
- 15:30 Roundtable on Taiwan's experiences with tackling disinformation and foreign interference, chaired by H.E. Lo Ping-chen, minister without portfolio and spokesperson of the Executive Yuan
- 18:00 Working dinner with Yang Jen-ni, Deputy Trade Representative, Office of Trade Negotiations, Executive Yuan

Friday, 5 November 2021

- 08:00 Hotel meeting with H.E. Audrey Tang, minister without portfolio and Digital Minister
- 09:30 Hotel meeting with Evan Morrissey, acting political chief of the American Institute in Taipei
- 11:00 Meeting with H.E. You Si-kun, President of the Legislative Yuan
- 12:00 Working lunch with You Si-kun, President of the Legislative Yuan
- 15:00 Press conference at the Marriott Hotel

22:05 The delegation departs from Taiwan