

## The European Union and Taiwan

### Bully for China

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#### China tells the EU to dump on Taiwan. The EU asks "How hard?"

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ASK officials in Brussels about relations between China and the European Union, and you will soon hear the word "values". A recent EU strategy paper on China calls on Europe to pursue a "dynamic relationship with China based on our values", notably including democracy and human rights.

Try telling that to Taiwan. It is about to receive a stern EU injunction to act "sensibly and responsibly" by scrapping a planned referendum asking voters whether they would like the island to seek membership of the United Nations under its historic name, the "Republic of China", or just "Taiwan".

Why is the EU meddling? Taiwan is a thriving democracy and big trading partner (almost as important as India or Brazil). The explanation is simple and unedifying: the EU is doing China's bidding. Chinese rulers regard the Taiwan referendum as a sneaky step closer to an eventual declaration of formal independence by the island.

China expends extraordinary energy on pestering other governments to preserve the strange limbo inhabited by Taiwan, a self-governing island of 23m that it insists is a wayward province. Whenever Taiwan irks China, its ambassadors appear at foreign ministries worldwide, demanding that Taiwan be rebuked.

An internal EU memorandum sheds light on the way such strong-arm diplomacy works. Prepared by officials working under Javier Solana, the EU's foreign-policy supremo, it describes a meeting, late last month, between the Chinese ambassador to the EU, Guan Chengyuan, and a top Eurocrat. According to EU note-takers, Mr Guan called the referendum provocative and destabilising, and said China wanted EU support, as it did not want to have to use "the last resort"—an apparent reference to its threat to use force, if necessary, to "reunify" Taiwan.

The memorandum records Mr Guan's EU host as agreeing that a referendum is against Taiwan's own interests, and offering to send a "clear and forceful" message to Taipei to that effect. America, which has many reasons to seek China's diplomatic goodwill, has publicly rebuked Taiwan over the referendum. The EU, in contrast, will stick to private warnings for the moment, to avoid "playing into the hands" of Taiwan's "populist" president, Chen Shui-bian, by giving him "undesirable" publicity.

Portugal, which took over the six-month rotating presidency of the EU this month, has duly drafted a private warning to Taiwan, saying that a referendum risks raising tensions and would be "unhelpful". A parallel message is to be sent to China, urging restraint.

UN membership for Taiwan is a long-lost cause, and Mr Chen's referendum plan is at heart an electoral ploy ahead of next year's presidential poll. But that is the sort of thing that happens in a democracy. One dissenting EU diplomat says the Union is pretending there is "moral equivalence" between Taiwanese election politics and Chinese threats of violence. Certainly, this is not how most people understand the EU's oft-professed values.