

Senior MEP calls for EU to “step up the pressure” on China over attempts to bring Taiwan under its control

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News

China “hell-bent” on reunification with Taiwan, says Taiwan's EU and Belgium representative Harry Tseng.



Michael Gahler MEP (DE, EPP) | Photo credit: European Parliament Audiovisual

Speaking in Brussels, Michael Gahler (EPP), who chairs the European parliament’s newly-reformed Taiwan Friendship Group, said, “Taiwan urgently needs our support. It is in dire need of this.”

The MEP’s comments come amid criticism of China’s policy towards Taiwan, which has been compared to the arrangement for the return of the former British colony of Hong Kong to Chinese rule in 1997.

Hong Kong has been hit by months of anti-government protests triggered by widespread resentment of what many city residents see as relentless efforts by Beijing to exert control over their city despite

promises of autonomy.

China has proposed that Taiwan be brought under Chinese rule under a similar arrangement, but Gahler believes Beijing's policies towards the island were a danger to regional stability.

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The Friendship Group, he said, "aims to enhance cross-border support for Taiwan and to forge stronger ties between Taiwan, the EU, and like-minded European countries."

He was speaking alongside Taiwan ambassador Harry Tseng, of the Taipei Representative Office in the EU and Belgium, at an event to mark Taiwan's national day.

Tseng described the situation in Taiwan as "a litmus test to determine the resilience of democracies around the world."

"I have talked about the threat to Taiwan's values and freedoms, and urged the support of our friends in the international community. Now, as we stand here in 2019, the message remains unchanged, but Taiwan's position grows ever more critical."

Tseng said that China's president Xi Jinping had begun the new year with a speech focused on China's relations with Taiwan, the so-called 'Message to Compatriots', which was given once every decade.

This was the fifth time a People's Republic president had made a speech of this kind, and it marked the 40th anniversary of the first such statement China made to Taiwan in 1979.

"If Hong Kong is a lesson to learn, it isn't hard to understand why the people of Taiwan utterly reject this model of 'one country, two systems'" **Harry Tseng, Taipei Representative in the EU and Belgium**

"The stage was set for Mr. Xi to lay out his vision for the future of Taiwan-China relations. What did we learn about that vision?" asked Tseng.

"We learned first of all that China's president Xi is hell-bent on achieving what he sees as 'reunification' with Taiwan. He used the word for 'unify', in various forms, 46 times during the speech. It's clear this has become a deeply personal mission for him."

The Taiwan representative said the country has learned that Xi intends to "impose not negotiate."

Tseng referred to the concept of 'one country, two systems', that was developed in the early 1980s by Chinese leaders, as a model for Taiwan to be brought under the governance of Beijing.

The diplomat said, "The promise was that life would continue as normal, just under a different flag, a PRC flag. We can think of Hong Kong as a test for 'one country, two systems'".

"Anyone who has followed the news over the past several months knows that this promise has proven to be vacuous. A new extradition bill is just the latest in the long list of encroachments on Hong Kong's freedoms."

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"As Hong Kong police, backed up by China, cracked down heavy-handedly, the people of Hong Kong did not flinch. They continued, week after week, to take to the parks, streets, metro stations and airports."

Tseng told the packed audience, "If Hong Kong is a lesson to learn, it isn't hard to understand why the people of Taiwan utterly reject this model of 'one country, two systems'".

He noted, "We are living in strange times. In many places around the world people are turning their backs on empathy and turning instead to a politics of hatred and discrimination; turning to strong leaders, where 'strong' is shorthand for charismatic, manipulative or authoritarian; turning to an 'us' versus 'them' mentality, which diminishes us all."

"In these times, it's more important than ever that we uphold and defend the core values of democracy, rule of law, freedom of press, right of assembly and religious freedoms."

Taiwan's National Day marks the anniversary of the start of a 1911 uprising that led to the end of dynastic rule in China and the founding of a republic.

Cold War hostility between the island and the mainland had eased over the past decade or so as both sides focused more on expanding business ties, but relations have cooled considerably of late.

About the author

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