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Slovenian Foreign Policy toward Taiwan: Implications of Regional and Interregional Dynamics*

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Abstract

After nearly eighteen years of independence and successful integration into the Euro-Atlantic structures Slovenia has become more capable to act on the world stage. The growing interregional cooperation between the European Union (EU) and Asia has provided Slovenia with an opportunity to get more engaged in Asian affairs and participate in the enhancement of the EU's political and security role in the Asian region. The Taiwan Strait is one of the most perilous spots that has the potential to trigger a war in Asia and bring dire consequences for the EU and its member-states. Therefore, it cannot be ignored in the European strategic calculus.

Keywords: Slovenia, small states, Europeanization, interregionalism, Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), Taiwan.

In May 2004, Slovenia successfully accomplished one of its key strategic orientations of its foreign policy – the acquisition of full membership of the European Union (EU). Since then, Slovenia upholds the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP)¹ and complies with EU principles and decisions in conducting its foreign policy. Integration into Europe has enhanced Slovenia's profile and its presence in the international community, as well as its ability to participate in the processes taking place within it. In other words, it has extended

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¹ The CFSP provides the central framework for the EU's foreign and security affairs.

the scope of influence of Slovenia's foreign policy and allowed this small country to play a global role. Reinforced EU-China cooperation, which is considered as a priority in the EU's CFSP, has manifold implications for Slovenia's own policy toward China. In the same way, the EU's increasing attentiveness toward the Taiwan issue is having some impact on Slovenia's awareness toward this top security issue in the Asian region.

Little research has been done regarding Slovenia's relations with the East Asian² countries, let alone its relations with Taiwan. This article attempts to highlight the Taiwan issue from a Slovenian perspective and is expected to substantially contribute to bilateral research and foreign policy analysis. Firstly, the article elaborates on the impact of Slovenia's EU accession on its foreign policy, which includes the so-called Europeanization and interregionalism. Next, it examines bilateral relationship between Slovenia and Taiwan and illuminates the structural constraints of cooperation. Finally, it analyses the role and weight of a small state in international security issue and indicates some possible ways in which Slovenia could contribute positively to the EU's endeavors to maintain stability in the Taiwan Strait.

1 The Effect of Europeanization and Interregionalism on Slovenian Foreign Policy

1.1 Conceptualizing Europeanization and Interregionalism

Much has been written in the last couple of years on "Europeanization," a highly disputed concept which is used to depict a variety of phenomena and processes of change concerning the transformation and adaptation of the EU member-states' politics and policies. In general, Europeanization is described as a two-way process whereby national actors not only adapt to, but also seek to shape, the trend of European integration in general and EU policies and processes in particular (Flockhart 2006: 86-91). Embraced as the leading theory in Slovenia's transition to democracy, Europeanization has both constrained and enabled politics in Slovenia (Fink-Hafner and Lajh 2003: 22-26). Slovenia has successfully resorted

² Here, East Asia refers to the thirteen member-countries of ASEAN Plus Three (Brunei, Cambodia, China, Japan, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, South Korea, Thailand, and Vietnam).

to European regionalism for sovereignty and resource pooling, empowering itself with additional resources to exert influence and become a more visible actor in world affairs. The EU has exerted significant influence on Slovenian foreign policy with changes observed both at the organizational level (as witnessed by the reorganization of the Foreign Ministry) and at the conceptual level (as observed in official documents and speeches) (Kajnič 2005: 3-6). The CFSP, for example, has had a great impact on the Slovenian foreign policy agenda, widening the range of issues it has to consider. The influence can be observed not merely from adaptation pressures from the EU level to the national level, but also from the indirect pressure exerted through exchanges with other member-states and through Slovenia's socialization and learning processes (Ibid).

Apart from regionalism, interregionalism has likewise offered an additional diplomatic channel for interacting in the world system. Moreover, it has significantly promoted the EU's foreign policies and external relations and coerced the policymaking elites toward more coordinated reflexes on foreign policy. The main vehicle for EU-Asia interregional cooperation, the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM),³ is not only consolidating the EU's position as an actor on the global stage but also stimulating region and community-building within East Asia itself and providing more ways to deal with security issues (Reiterer 2006: 223-43 and; Söderbaum, et al 2005: 365-80). From the normative side, ASEM is providing the EU with a powerful mechanism for projecting its soft power⁴ in the region. Prompting the norms of peaceful conduct and a more open community-building may subtly affect China's thinking and facilitate the integration of Taiwan into the East Asian economic and political set-up (Bersick 2006: 19). Accession to the EU provided Slovenia with an opportunity to multilateralize relations with individual Asian countries and offer both practical and normative input within the ASEM regime. Although it has so far not launched any comprehensive strategy, it has engaged more in the region and developed a more proactive foreign policy toward Asia.

³ The ASEM is the highest-level dialogue and interregional forum between Europe and East Asia, bringing together forty-five members (twenty-seven EU members, the European Commission, sixteen Asian countries, and the ASEAN Secretariat), covering political, economic, and cultural sectors of cooperation.

⁴ The term "soft power" refers to the ability to achieve desired outcomes through attraction rather than coercion. Means of exercising soft power include culture, political values, and foreign policies. See Nye 2004. Nevertheless, Chinese susceptibility to European soft power is questionable and difficult to assess.

1.2 The Evolving CFSP and Its Implications for Slovenia

The progressive CFSP and the European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP) reflect the EU's desire for a more prominent role in global security. The Slovenian government fully supports the CFSP and ESDP and the development of the EU's conflict prevention and crisis management capabilities.⁵ In general, Slovenian public opinion has been very supportive toward the evolving EU Constitution⁶ and the current security environment.⁷ It has been perceived that a stronger CFSP with a European foreign minister and its own diplomatic service would give small member-states more influence over the way Europe acts on the world stage than they could wield as separate actors (Kráľ 2005: 8-9). Slovenia's EU membership is vital in bolstering confidence in its foreign policy. Slovenia has been intensifying its participation in the external activities of the Union at all levels. Although Slovenia's priority is the stabilization of countries in its immediate vicinity, in consideration of its interests, international obligations, and capabilities, Slovenia has also pledged to train forces and constructively cooperate in joint operations to contribute to peace and stability in other world crisis hotspots (Slovenia Ministry of Defense: *Srednjeročni obrambni program 2005-2010*; and *Obrambni sistem Republike Slovenije*). Therefore, the cooperation of Slovenia's military in international crisis-response operations has become an integral part of Slovenia's foreign policy. By taking part in European security policy decision-making, Slovenia is acquiring a stronger role and position in the international community.

⁵ Conflict prevention and crisis management tasks (the "Petersberg tasks") are defined in the Treaty on European Union (Article 17) and the EU's first-ever security strategy (ESS) adopted in December 2003. See Petersberg Declaration, 1992.

⁶ Slovenia swiftly ratified the EU Constitution without a referendum in early 2005. However, due to problems with ratification in some other EU member-states, European leaders in June 2007 reached a compromise agreement on a "Reform Treaty" rather than a constitution (The Lisbon Treaty), which was formally adopted on December 13, 2007, and now needs to be ratified by all twenty-seven member-states. See Europa: A Constitution for Europe, 2008.

⁷ A great majority of Slovenians support the EU's Constitution, the CFSP, and the ESDP in particular. See Eurobarometer 69, 2008.

1.3 EU-Asia Interregionalism and Slovenia

The intensifying relationship between the EU and Asia is becoming more influential in defining and shaping international politics. As implied above, interregionalism has nourished a common identity and coherence among EU member-states, structurally affected the EU members' foreign policies, and increased their interest in East Asia. Moreover, it has enhanced the EU's responsibility for dealing with security issues in East Asia and, hence, preserving stability in the Taiwan Strait. For Slovenia, involvement in intensifying EU-Asia partnership entails its obligation to abide by the multitude of guidelines and agreements settled between the EU and Asia, as well as an access to join the programs of cooperation of the two partners and intensify its relations with East Asian countries, both bilaterally and under the framework of the EU. By pledging to contribute to the EU's endeavors toward the development of dialogue and cooperation with Asia within the framework of ASEM, Slovenia became closely involved in the comprehensive process of EU-Asia interregional cooperation. Slovenia has shown great interest in accessing the ASEM forum as it can help the country foster stronger political, economic, cultural, and educational links with Asian countries (Slovenia Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Annual Report 2006*). ASEM has increased Slovenia's interest in Asia and encouraged the upgrading of relations with the majority of Asian nations. In its declaration on activities in the EU ahead of and during its presidency in the first half of 2008, Slovenia pledged to concentrate its attention in Asia toward the regional hotspots and to enhance cooperation with the EU's strategic partners in the region (ASEAN, China, Japan, India, and Russia) (Uradni list RS 31/2007). Despite the distance and the unfamiliar business environment for Slovenia (compared to the EU and Russian markets), trade and economic relations between Slovenia and Asia have witnessed remarkable growth. Slovenia's total trade with East Asia increased by 38.3 percent in 2004 compared to 2003 (from €303.3 million to €49.56 million), the highest annual rise since the beginning of cooperation. In 2007, the total value of trade reached a remarkable €1,149.52 million and it is expected to continue to rise in the future (see figure 1).

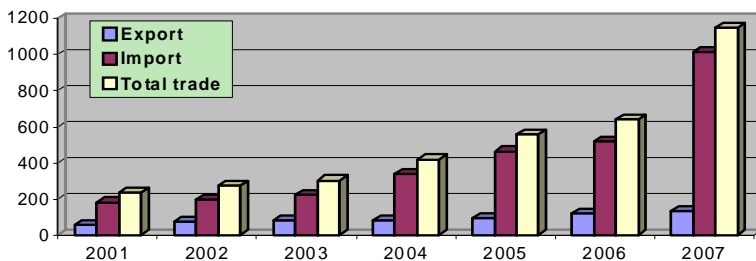


Figure 1: Slovenia's Trade Volume with East Asia (2001–2007, € million)⁸

China is central to the EU's policy in Asia. Slovenia, too, has recently been very enthusiastic about enhancing its relations with China. The EU accession has changed Slovenia's conditions under which it cooperates with China.⁹ Slovenian presidency has also been very symbolic in the way it demonstrated the ability of a small new member-state to engage actively in EU-level politics. In line with expectations, the Slovenian EU presidency carefully followed the already established orientation of the EU-China comprehensive strategic partnership and worked closely with the European Commission and other member-states, especially on the issue of the cross-Strait stability.

To sum up, by joining the EU, Slovenia has extended the scope of its foreign policy and can now actively participate in discussions and initiatives that seek to promote international stability. Although it has not formulated any specific foreign policy objectives or regional strategies toward Asia, by joining ASEM, Slovenia has incorporated an Asian perspective into its foreign policy that will gradually encourage closer attention to important security issues in the region. Similarly, the growing importance of East Asia to the EU will affect its members' perceptions of the Taiwan security problem. Recently, there has been a strong trend toward convergence in policy on the cross-Strait issue among the EU member-states (Wong, 2005: 2). Not only has the issue received more frequent mention in the EU's policy statements, the EU has also pledged to contribute to the maintenance

⁸ Source: SURS, *External Trade*.

⁹ For instance, the mechanism offered by sectoral dialogue, which now covers twenty-four different areas, provides Slovenia with a new channel for resolving any open questions with China. See European Commission, *External Relations: The EU's Relations with China*.

of peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait (*Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament EU-China: Closer Partners, Growing Responsibilities*, 2006). Any escalation of the conflict across the Taiwan Strait would have an impact on European security, and Slovenia would not be immune from this. During its EU presidency, Slovenia for the first time found itself in a position that required it to devote closer attention to events in the Taiwan Strait. On the EU's behalf, the Slovenian presidency issued three declarations on cross-Strait relations, all of which reflected the EU's interest in maintaining peace and stability between Taiwan and China (See *Declaration by the Presidency on behalf of the European Union on Cross-Straits Relations*, PESC/08/31 (March 4, 2008); *ibid*, PESC/08/39 (March 22, 2008); and *ibid*, PESC/08/68 (May 26, 2008)). Moreover, responding to the resumption of dialogue between Taiwan and China on June 12, 2008, following President Ma Ying-jeou's (馬英九) inauguration, the Slovenian presidency welcomed improved cross-Strait ties and expressed the hope that dialogue would promote the long-term peaceful political and economic development of the region (*EU Presidency Statement on re-establishment of dialogue between authorized non-governmental organizations engaged in talks on issues related to exchanges across the Taiwan Strait*, 2008). Hence, it may be argued that Slovenia has become more aware of the cross-Strait issue and further encouraged to address the realities related to developments in the region.

2 Overview of Relations between Slovenia and Taiwan

In line with the EU as a whole, Slovenia has never deviated from the "one China" policy. Nevertheless, there is a subtle nuance which distinguishes the Slovenian "one China" policy as defined in its joint communiqué from that adopted by the majority of the EU member-states. Whereas the joint communiqués signed by the majority of EU countries state that they "recognize there is only one China and that the Government of the PRC [People's Republic of China] is the sole legal government of China (and its people)," and do not apply the strong word "recognize" regarding the Chinese position on Taiwan's status, Slovenia in its joint communiqué on establishing diplomatic relations with China of May 1992, "recognizes" that the government of the PRC is the sole legal government of China as well as that "*Taiwan is an inalienable part of Chinese territory*" (*Joint Communiqué on the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations Between the People's*

Republic of China and the Republic of Slovenia, 1992). Notably, the EU is committed to ambiguity surrounding the “one China” issue and consciously notes the difference between the EU’s “one China policy” and the orthodox “one China principle” imposed by China which implies that Taiwan is a province of China and an inseparable part of its territory. Slovenia, notwithstanding the anti-communist euphoria in the country after the dissolution of Yugoslavia in the early 1990s, was well aware that China’s vote in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) would be decisive in gaining recognition of Slovenia as an independent country. Although Slovenia has been interested in developing relations with Taiwan ever since independence, even forging trade deals with Taiwan was believed to be politically risky and to jeopardize Slovenia’s entry into the UN.¹⁰ China’s clout in international affairs has always been an important consideration in the formulation of Ljubljana’s foreign policy. In addition to considerations surrounding Slovenia’s security and its place in the international community, friendship with Beijing has also been perceived as critical for Slovenia’s economic development. At present, neither Slovenia nor any other European government wants to risk damaging its relationship with Beijing, since all agree that their greater economic interests, at least in the long term, are on the Chinese mainland, and for this reason they do not treat Taiwan as a political entity but as a separate economic and commercial entity. There are no treaties between Slovenia and Taiwan. Like most other EU countries, their links are confined to semi-governmental channels and largely limited to the economic, scientific, educational, and cultural sectors. Among these, economic exchange is the most fruitful. China tolerates all forms of trade between Slovenia and Taiwan as long as it does not interfere with politics and official government issues. In 2007, with a bilateral trade volume of €52.737 million (€7.763 million of Slovenian exports to Taiwan and €44.974 million of Taiwanese exports to Slovenia), Taiwan was Slovenia’s fifth largest trading partner in East Asia (see figure 2).

¹⁰ The following articles display the fierce debate among Slovene diplomats on the issue of promoting ties with Taiwan in early 1991: Millionig 1991:9; Rupel 1991: 3; and Trček 1991: 30-31.

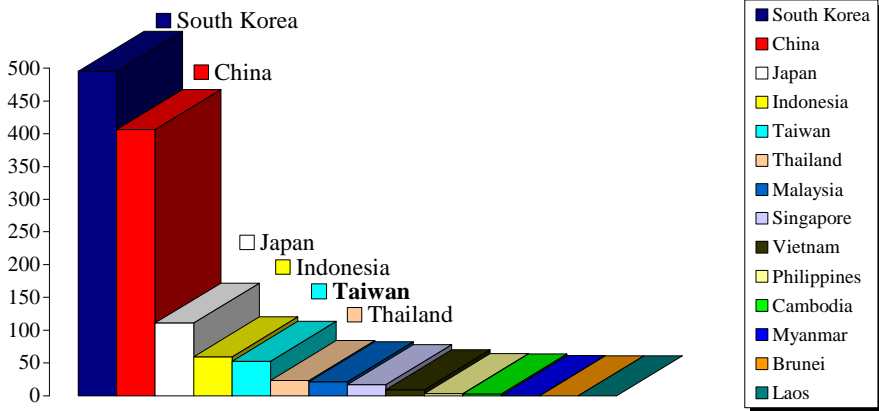


Figure 2: Volume of Slovenia-Taiwan Trade Compared to Slovenia's Trade with Other East Asian Countries, 2007 (€ million)¹¹

Although this trade volume is by no means small, it cannot compete with Slovenia's continuously increasing trade with China (see figure 3).¹²

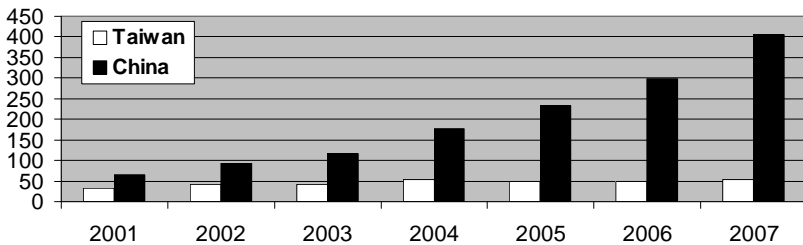


Figure 3: Comparison of Trade between Slovenia and Taiwan/China, Total Trade Amount (€ million, 2001-2007)¹³

¹¹ Source: Statistični urad Republike Slovenije (SURS), External Trade.

¹² However, it is important to note that since Taiwanese-owned companies in mainland China are major exporters, a substantial proportion of Chinese exports to Slovenia can be attributed to Taiwanese investors.

¹³ Source: SURS, External Trade.

In 2007, trade between Slovenia and China was worth €406.52 million (€60.571 million of Slovenian exports to China and €345.95 million of Chinese exports to Slovenia) (SURS, *External Trade*).

The major barrier to more intensive cooperation between Slovenia and Taiwan is the lack of any form of representative office in either of the two countries. This hampers the flow of information on doing business in the two countries and is a serious hindrance to potential investors. Just like the embassy in Beijing, which has helped many Slovenian companies break into the Chinese market and strengthen their relations with China, a Slovenian representative office in Taiwan or a Taiwan office in Slovenia would undoubtedly optimize the benefits of nonofficial ties and stimulate closer economic relations between the two sides. Although most countries remain unwilling to modify their stance on formal political and diplomatic ties, they have responded to Taiwan's diplomatic efforts by gradually allowing political extensions to commercial ties by, for instance, upgrading Taiwan's unofficial trade offices, permitting ministerial-level visits, opening air links, and supporting Taiwan's membership of the World Trade Organization (WTO), the World Health Organization (WHO), and other international organizations. Currently sixteen of the twenty-seven EU members have trade offices in Taiwan and Taiwan has nineteen representative offices in EU countries. Slovenia, together with five (Estonia, Lithuania, Malta, Bulgaria, and Romania) of the twelve members that have joined the EU since 2004, has no representative office in Taiwan (Taiwanese Bureau of Consular Affairs, 2009). Although the Slovenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs is striving to intensify relations with countries which could become important for political or economic reasons, Taiwan seems to be seen as lacking sufficient political and economic weight and of carrying too great a risk. The need for representative offices has been admitted on both sides, but no action has been taken. Understandably, the Taiwan side insists that its office should have a certain diplomatic, rather than solely economic, status, whereas Ljubljana remains wary about establishing a quasi-diplomatic office under ministerial guidance which would risk antagonizing Beijing.¹⁴ Representative offices play a significant role in promoting bilateral

¹⁴ In October 2003, Mihael Brejc addressed a question on the possibility of opening a Taiwanese economic representative office in Slovenia to the foreign minister Dimitrij Rupel. From the minister's answer it is clear that the government did not intend to depart from the Slovenian legislation which provides no legal basis for conferring immunities or privileges on a non-diplomatic representative office of a state. See National Assembly of the RS, 2003.

relations and help to project Taiwan's image as a sovereign entity as they maximize the official substance of its semi-official relations. The promotion of economic, cultural, and other relations between Slovenia and Taiwan is currently the responsibility of the Taipei Economic and Cultural Office (TECO) in Vienna. The Taiwanese representative office in Budapest, the Taiwan Trade Center, which was initially in charge of Slovenian-Taiwanese cooperation, likewise still helps in coordinating their economic exchanges. While Slovenia can now ask any EU member which has a diplomatic mission in a particular country to protect Slovenian nationals, those diplomatic missions cannot perform other functions, such as trade and investment promotion or the assertion of Slovenia's positions and its interests. Therefore, a representative office would provide the foundation for more substantive ties.

Slovenia-Taiwan relations were particularly dynamic in the 1990s, with frequent exchanges of visits and enhanced cooperation. In November 1992, the first Slovenian trade delegation to visit Taiwan, from the Slovenian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (now the Chamber of Economy), signed a trade cooperation agreement with the China External Trade Development Council (CETRA, now known as the Taiwan External Trade Development Council, TAITRA, 對外貿易發展協會) (*Taiwan Yearbook 2006*). In July 1993, the two sides reached an agreement on avoidance of double taxation, which enhanced their business cooperation. In September 1994, Taiwan was the only Asian country invited by the Slovenian Ministry of Economy to participate in a European conference on small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to be held in Slovenia which offered Taiwanese companies assistance in breaking into the Slovenian market. One bilateral cooperation project which has not been widely publicized was the Slovenian plan to construct light armored vehicles for Taiwan in 1993. As the project offered a good business deal, the Slovenian government was quick in permitting the local ironworks to buy the license for the construction of the vehicles. However, as soon as news of the plan reached Beijing, the Chinese issued an instant warning to the Slovenian Foreign Ministry and the project was abandoned (Mičić, 2003: 23-24). This example clearly shows the constraints imposed by the China factor. Reasonably, for a small and young country, the cost of alienating China was judged to outweigh the assumed benefits to be derived from supporting Taiwan.

The right-leaning Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS, in government from 2004 to 2008) has endeavored to nurture ties with the Taiwanese representatives located in neighboring countries. The Slovenia-Taiwan Friendship Association, established in October 1997 at the initiative of the SDS leader Janez Janša (who was until recently the premier), is seen as the main pro-Taiwan lobbying group in Slovenia. Its functions include the promotion of economic, scientific, educational, cultural, sporting, and other nonpolitical cooperation and it has about sixty members.¹⁵ When it was still in opposition, the SDS frequently questioned the Slovenian government's affection for Beijing and the domestic media have occasionally criticized the government's China policy. In May 1998, an SDS member of parliament inquired about the possibility of establishing diplomatic relations with Taiwan in a letter to the foreign minister.¹⁶ On October 10, 1998, the Republic of China's national day, the Taiwanese representative office in Budapest in collaboration with the Slovenia-Taiwan Friendship Association organized a party in Ljubljana which was attended by a number of Slovenian parliamentarians and scholars. Then, when Taiwan made a diplomatic breakthrough with Macedonia in early 1999, there were even rumors that Slovenia was interested in establishing diplomatic relations with Taiwan, with newspapers reporting that Slovenia had expressed an interest in improving ties with Taiwan (Baković, 1999: 8). There were also reports in the press that Taiwan had attempted to exercise its economic diplomacy on Slovenia not merely through trade but also through offers of economic assistance and investment (Brejč in Biščak, 1999: 16). Interestingly, in next to no time, the Slovenian Foreign Ministry was put under pressure to publicly reassert its loyalty to the PRC and pledge not to establish diplomatic relations with Taiwan (*STA*, 16.2.1999). The Chinese ambassador in Slovenia was quick to remind the government of the "one China" policy and to warn against Taiwanese diplomatic stratagems (Šaunik, 2000: 35).

Notwithstanding these limits on political ties, Slovenia was unyielding in its nurturing of valuable economic cooperation with Taiwan. Taiwanese trade

¹⁵ Interview with the secretary of the Slovenia-Taiwan Friendship Association (Ljubljana, 19.11.2007).

¹⁶ The foreign minister's response quoted the 1992 Sino-Slovenian communiqué in which Slovenia affirmed that it would not establish official relations with Taiwan. However, the minister added a paragraph to explain that this did not preclude the already developed cooperation with Taiwan in economic and other areas that is common practice among a majority of other countries. See Hvalica, 1998; and Frlec, 1998.

delegations to Europe continued to include Slovenia on their itineraries. In 1999, an additional cooperative agreement was signed between the Slovenian Chamber of Economy and the ROC National Association of Industry and Commerce (CNAIC, 中華民國工商協進會), which further boosted business and industrial cooperation. In the same year, the Slovenian Chamber of Economy, with support from the Taiwan Representative Office in Budapest, joined with the Imports-Exports Association of Taipei to organize a Slovenia-Taiwan business seminar which was attended by over forty Slovenian companies and seventeen Taiwanese representatives. In addition, over one hundred individual meetings between Slovenian and Taiwanese companies were organized alongside the seminar, indicating considerable interest in more intimate cooperation (*STA*, 3.12.1999). When Li Peng (李鵬), chairman of the Standing Committee of China's National People's Congress, refused to meet with the Slovenian premier and foreign minister during his unfortunate visit to Slovenia in June 2000, Sino-Slovenian relations reached their lowest level since 1992. According to rumors, one factor which prompted Li to cancel the official meeting was his dissatisfaction with manifest advocacy of Taiwan by SDS members.¹⁷ Although SDS supporters of Taiwan were vocal when in opposition, after the party won the 2004 general election they adopted a more pragmatic approach to relations with China and Taiwan. Moreover, the initial genuine desire for deepened cooperation with Taiwan (albeit in the context of the "one China" policy) seems to have faded out. The Slovenia-Taiwan Friendship Association is now rather inactive.

Nevertheless, despite the reduced intensity of cooperation compared to the 1990s, it is clear that Slovenia-Taiwan relations have reached a higher level of collaboration. Political exchanges, albeit informal ones, have increased and are conducted on a regular basis. The most recent high-level meeting, which was kept low-profile, took place in Taipei in August 2007, when President Chen Shui-bian (陳水扁) met with the SDS vice president and member of the European Parliament, Mihael Brejc, and the minister of public administration, Gregor Virant (*U.S. Fed News*, 31.8.2007). It is understandable that such an extremely sensitive

¹⁷ Li Peng cancelled an official meeting with Prime Minister Andrej Bajuk and Foreign Minister Lojze Peterle. His visit was marked by demonstrations in support of Tibet and against China's human rights violations, in which some SDS members participated, and this presumably offended the Chinese side. The defense minister's friendliness with Taiwan also contributed to Chinese irritation. See BBC Monitoring Asia-Pacific – Political 16.6.2000.

relationship requires unconventional channels of communication and the utmost caution to avoid Beijing's antagonism. The avoidance of the Taiwan issue in written public statements does not preclude quiet communication in behind-the-scenes dialogue; however, the vibrancy of the latter remains concealed.

On an economic level, Taiwanese representatives from offices in neighboring countries continue to meet regularly with Slovenian economic officials endeavoring to enhance bilateral economic ties. The Slovenian Chamber of Economy organizes regular trade seminars, supported by the Taiwan representative office in Budapest, introducing business opportunities in Taiwan and thereby providing an important channel of communication between the two sides. The latest seminar, entitled "The Taiwan Trade Center's Support to Slovenian Enterprises in Business with Taiwan," took place in April 2008 (GZS, 2008). Since 2005, Taiwanese businessmen, accompanied by representatives of TAITRA and the Board of Foreign Trade (BOFT), have participated in the annual international trade fair in Celje, the largest trade fair in Slovenia, displaying "Made in Taiwan" products to a wide circle of visitors.

Slovenia-Taiwan ties are not limited to economic and trade exchanges. Cultural and academic exchanges in particular have been quite fruitful. The most important initiator of people-to-people ties between Slovenia and Taiwan is the renowned Slovenian missionary and doctor, Janez Janež, who worked in Taiwan from 1952 to 1990. Today, a newly built hospital in the town of Lotung (羅東) carries his name (羅東聖母醫院范鳳龍紀念大樓). The doctor's legacy provides an important cultural and spiritual bond between Slovenia and Taiwan (Saje, 2007). The University of Ljubljana's Department of Asian Studies was opened in 1995 and Taiwan history and politics are included in its general curriculum, as is the study of traditional Chinese characters which are used in Taiwan. Slovenian students are awarded scholarships from Taiwan's Ministry of Education to study in Taiwan as well as grants from individual Taiwanese universities. It is hoped that when these students return home they will help build up support for Taiwan and contribute to Slovenia-Taiwan ties. Taiwan's Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation for International Scholarly Exchange (蔣經國國際學術交流基金會) has its European headquarters in Prague and since the mid-1990s it has provided grants to scholars and academic institutions for Chinese and Taiwan studies. Slovenian students and professors are regularly granted financial assistance for their academic research.

The Foundation has also financed the creation of university chairs in Taiwan studies in Europe and boosted academic research on Taiwan as witnessed by the establishment of the European Association for Taiwanese Studies (EATS, 歐洲臺灣研究學會) in London in 2004, which is at the moment endeavoring to build a network of institutions and academics involved in Taiwan studies throughout Eastern and Central Europe (including Slovenia) in order to accelerate Taiwan-Europe academic exchange and improve awareness of Taiwan.

Taiwanese cultural activities in Europe in general have visibly expanded since the early 1990s. Under the administration of President Chen Shui-bian in particular, Taiwan representative offices have given priority to promoting cultural events that are supposedly typically Taiwanese. The film industry, for example, has provided Taiwan with a channel for cultural exchange with Slovenia and has produced some important cultural exports. Taiwanese movies are frequently shown at the Ljubljana International Film Festival. There is, however, still room for more people-to-people exchanges through cultural affairs, youth programs, medical and public health work, religion, education, and scholarship. Tourism, though hampered by the cumbersome visa application procedure for Taiwanese citizens, also provides an additional area for cooperation.¹⁸

3 A Small State in International Security: The Taiwan Strait

An assessment of Slovenia's role in the international arena is most commonly advanced by the recognition of its smallness.¹⁹ On the whole, small countries strive to avoid conflicts and any big risks and pursue a peaceful foreign policy—a manner generally referred to as a “low-profile approach.” This implies that small countries do not want to get overexposed or be the center of attention, but would rather follow the behavior of the majority and play the role of honest middleman or a neutral coordinator (Baillie 1998: 210-11). This is due to their dependence on the external environment which makes them both sensitive and vulnerable to changes in that environment. Furthermore, due to lack of resources, small

¹⁸ In February 2009 Taiwan has included Slovenia in its visa-waiver program and thus substantially improved the visa regime for Slovenian citizens. Whether Slovenia and other EU member-states will reciprocate the visa-free offer, however, remains to be observed.

¹⁹ See, for example: Petrič 1996: 876-97; Benko 1997; Jazbec 2001; and Salvatore et al 2001. For a recent instructive conceptualization of the notion of size of states see Thorhallsson 2006: 7-31.

countries are generally focused on their immediate international environment and if they do get involved in global problems they deal with them from the narrow perspective of their own region (Benko 1997: 7). It goes without saying that all these circumstances have major implications in terms of a country's competence to act internationally.

Slovenia was motivated to seek integration into multilateral structures and membership of the EU partly because of its smallness, and that smallness is now playing a very significant role in conditioning Slovenia's interests, behavior, and influence in the EU. Slovenia has been an eager participant in European regionalism, perceiving that the multitude of the EU's activities will provide it with more opportunities to find new sources of power that do not depend on its size, area, or population. In order to cope with the problem of being small, Slovenia has concentrated its attention on issues where it has a specific interest at stake. On the regional level, Slovenia has gradually managed to achieve a positive image and a crucial role within the EU in dealing with the issues concerning its neighbors in the Western Balkans. Its active involvement in the Kosovo tangle provides a lucid example (Kajnič 2008: 5). Nevertheless, on the global level, Slovenia's foreign policy falls short of possessing a distinct strategy as can be observed in its main foreign policy documents²⁰ which clearly project Slovenia's regional mind-set and deficient strategy for operating on the global level.

Slovenia does not have much expertise in the Asia-Pacific region since that region is far down the list of Slovenia's priorities, despite the flourishing trade relations. Likewise, Slovenia's familiarity with the Taiwan issue is limited, and it lacks analytical capacity. The cross-Strait issue has in the last few years made a profound impact on internal debates within the EU. Seminars and workshops on cross-Taiwan Strait relations and the role the EU can play have increasingly begun to appear on the agendas of major European think-tanks (Istenič, 2007: 76-79). Through its engagement with China in political, economic, cultural, and other spheres, Slovenia has the capability to facilitate the EU's capacity to project its soft power. Moreover, as an EU member it plays an important part in the

²⁰ These documents include the foreign policy strategy of 1991 (Temelji strategije zunanje politike RS), the declaration on foreign policy of 1999 (Deklaracija o zunanji politiki RS), and the basic elements of Slovenian foreign policy and its integration with the Euro-Atlantic alliances of 2002 (Primerna zunanja politika—Temeljne prvine zunanje politike RS ob vključevanju v evroatlantske povezave).

maintaining the arms embargo on China which is viewed by most analysts as being of vital importance to cross-Strait stability. As the foreign minister at that time, Dimitrij Rupel, stated, China must continue the dialogue on human rights, ratify the UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, abolish the death penalty, release political prisoners, and improve relations with its neighboring countries, particularly Taiwan, before the embargo can be removed (Rupel in Kocijančič, 2005).

In an event of an escalation of the crisis in the Taiwan Strait, the EU would be faced with a major dilemma concerning its position in the conflict and its responsibility for crisis management or conflict resolution. The geographically remote cross-Strait conflict is not an issue of direct concern to Slovenia, so its policies in this area are less likely to be led by national interest and more likely to conform to the mainstream attitude of the EU, although that is difficult to predict. Admittedly, whereas the EU is coherent as regards the fundamental importance of preserving peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait, individual members' views on Taiwan's independence might significantly diverge in the event of a crisis, and this would hinder the EU's involvement in the conflict and put the credibility of its CFSP in question. As outlined above, the peace and stability of East Asia are of concern to the EU, and preventing any escalation of armed conflict in East Asia—which would have enormous global repercussions—should be the job of any responsible member of the global community. Building peace requires proactive efforts. With an ambitious foreign policy, a small country can exceed its physical limitations. Resource limitations are a concern for the Slovenian government, but the extent of Slovenia's influence in European external and security policy depends on non-material as well as material components, for example, the promotion of initiatives regarding the resolution of security issues. Slovenia's contribution will not be seen as merely symbolic if its government takes the initiative and proposes ways to solve conflicts not merely in its own vicinity but also in more distant parts of the world, like the Taiwan Strait. In its desire to be a more responsible global actor, Slovenia could consider developing a more comprehensive strategic policy framework toward China and contribute more to the peaceful settlement of the cross-Strait issue. Although the "one China" policy is the main structural constraint on Taiwan-Slovenia relations, Slovenia should closely adhere to its main foreign policy document which forthrightly states that it supports the peaceful resolution of disputes and rejects the use of force, and that it

respects and upholds the right of nations to self-determination (*Declaration on Foreign Policy of the Republic of Slovenia*, 1999). Slovenia should demonstrate that it is a mature and responsible member of the global community by actively participating in and contributing to issues of international concern.

4 Conclusion

Small countries seldom play an important role in international relations. Nevertheless, Slovenia now shares responsibility for the situation in the international community and is for the first time in a position to act on the global, regional, and sub-regional levels. It has become more capable of contributing to global well-being and has regularly expressed a desire to do so. Although it has in general kept a low profile on most foreign policy issues discussed in the European Council since its integration into the EU and is reluctant to choose a strategy of its own as it is perceived to be too small to effect any changes in the overall approach of the EU and its member-states, the EU presidency provided Slovenia with a unique opportunity to co-shape and co-create EU decisions on world peace and security. Taiwan is a significant factor in Asian regional security and therefore cannot be ignored in the strategic calculus of the EU and its member-states. Whereas the Slovenian government had paid little attention to security matters in the Taiwan Strait, failing to voice opinions at crucial junctures in cross-Strait relations and keeping as low a profile as possible, the EU's China policy framework has prompted Ljubljana to devote more attention to the Taiwan question, and this has influenced its perception of the Taiwan security problem. The Slovenian presidency regularly monitored and responded to events in Taiwan and China and took part in the EU's constructive role in the development of relations across the Taiwan Strait and kept them on the EU agenda. Needless to say, the international ambitions of states reflect the ambitions, or lack of ambitions, of their politicians. The political elite can choose to be merely reactive or to play an active role in the international system. Its members' responses to international events are influenced by domestic characteristics and the international system. To be sure, the main impetus for any initiatives regarding the Taiwan question would have to be derived from Slovenian national interests. The crucial question is whether it is in Slovenia's interest to be involved in the resolution of the cross-Strait conflict, and whether Taiwan's democracy is of any importance to Slovenia.

There are many similarities between the development of democracy in Taiwan and Slovenia. Presumably, Slovenia's historical and political background should make it more inclined to support the values to which it once desperately aspired. Slovenia has expressed its willingness to be a more responsible global actor and has been encouraged to engage in Asian security issues through the mechanisms offered by the EU. The findings of this analysis indicate that EU-level developments have had far-reaching consequences for the scope and content of Slovenia's China policy. Regional and interregional processes have opened up a channel through which Slovenia can now play a more responsible role in maintaining stability in the Taiwan Strait and demonstrate that small states can also exert an important influence on matters of international concern and contribute to global peace and security.

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