



# Slovak-Taiwan 1.5 Track Dialogue

## Summary & Recommendations



**CEIAS**  
Central European Institute  
of Asian Studies



**SFPFA**  
Slovak Foreign Policy Association

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## Summary & Recommendations

In January 2021, the Central European Institute of Asian Studies (CEIAS) and Slovak Foreign Policy Association (SFPA) organized the historically first meeting of the Slovak-Taiwan 1.5 Track Dialogue, a meeting of policymakers and non-government experts to discuss current pressing issues and solutions to them, as well as possibilities of mutual cooperation on these topics.

The discussion focused on two topics – disruption and resilience of global supply chains and spread of disinformation and other hybrid threats.

The following text is a summary of the discussion as understood by CEIAS and SFPA. All information is presented here without attribution to any specific person, organization, or government agency.

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# 1 Supply chain disruption and resilience

## 1.1 Summary

Both Slovakia and Taiwan have economic systems based on a high degree of openness to international trade and foreign investment. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has shown that a high degree of openness to foreign trade combined with reliance on producers from a single source country can disrupt the flows of (essential) goods.

International cooperation is a key component of supply chain diversification especially amongst countries with export-oriented economies such as Slovakia and Taiwan. The representatives from Slovakia pointed out that the existing economic cooperation between Taiwan and Slovakia has been growing stronger ever since the establishment of the representative offices.

Of particular significance is Taiwan's investment in Slovakia, which is estimated to be worth between 300 million to 400 million EUR, having created around 4000 jobs. It was also mentioned that Slovakia now has its first significant investor in Taiwan, yet when it comes to bilateral trade it still reports a trade deficit with Taiwan. The discussion addressed this area and explored new opportunities to diversify the supply chains and thus improve their resilience.

Taiwanese participants shared Taiwan's experience in restructuring its supply chains, which was initiated by the US-China trade war and accelerated by the pandemic.

In addition to the early establishment of the national team for the production of face masks, the Taiwanese government started investing in advanced manufacturing facilities. These facilities, along with Taiwan's strong pandemic prevention mechanisms, the pandemic's lesser impact on industrial operations in Taiwan, and rising domestic demand for ICT

products driven by an increase in remote working, attracted overseas Taiwanese companies to relocate to Taiwan.

Prioritizing server and network companies, then smart transportation and automation equipment companies, and finally SMEs and traditional industries, the government helped companies to adjust their capital deployment strategies. It also promoted production sites outside China, namely in Southeast Asia, which is one of the primary objectives of the New Southbound Policy.

The participants from both sides reconfirmed their interest in promoting bilateral relations and diversify their supply chains by enhancing cooperation in areas of potential, such as the ICT sector, AI, the Internet of Things, and semiconductors.

Panelists also argued in favor of promoting further exchanges in academia and R&D as well as between Slovak and Taiwanese biotech and biochemistry companies. Both sides stressed the need to foster economic cooperation and ensure activities of the already existing partnerships. Finally, they concluded by reiterating the support for the 1.5 track dialogue and future events.

## 1.2 Recommendations

- The COVID-19 pandemic, which forced many companies to choose between the efficiency and resilience of their supply chains, highlighted the risks of having a handful of suppliers from the same region and created opportunities for high-tech cooperation between Taiwan and Slovakia. Taiwanese high-tech companies have a strong presence in Slovakia, as seen in the case of Foxconn and Delta Electronics, but further cooperation between these and local companies should be promoted.
- Contrary to the increasing investment opportunities on both sides, there is a massive imbalance in bilateral trade in favor of Taiwan. Therefore, the need to create better opportunities for Slovak exports to Taiwan was emphasized. A great potential could be seen in exports of Slovak agricultural and wood products.
- With Taiwan currently seeking to upgrade its cooperation with Slovakia from manufacturing to digital industries, the potential for cooperation is seen predominantly between Slovakia's automotive and Taiwan's ICT industry. In particular, Slovakia and Taiwan could adopt a model of cooperation in the area of machine tool technology, where Taiwan would help to introduce AI to increase productivity and flexibility of production.
- Slovakia's central European location is seen as an advantage for Taiwan, as it could promote Taiwan's integration within the EU supply chains. With the overreliance on suppliers from one country being scrutinized, Taiwan is seen as a reliable partner in the areas of AI, the Internet of Things, and semiconductors. It was suggested that the Taiwanese government is expressing an increased interest in working with their Slovak counterparts to create strong industrial ties between Taiwan and Europe.
- Whilst China is employing a combined strategy of disseminating disinformation and showcasing its strong economic base to counter the effectiveness of the liberal democratic model in handling a global

pandemic, partnership with Taiwan is based on the same values and principles promoted by the EU. The panelists, therefore, argued that the restructuring of supply chains requires a united approach amongst like-minded democratic partners, which includes Taiwan.

- Taiwan is already working with contractors from the EU on the island's offshore wind power farms, with the collaboration mode being joint ventures and/or technical cooperation. Noteworthy examples are the cases of Taiwan-Dutch and Taiwan-Czech cooperation, the former being in the area of information security and the latter in smart cities, start-ups, and smart machinery. Other areas of Taiwan-EU cooperation include biotechnology, 5G, and electric vehicles, with Taiwanese companies being suppliers of car electronics and batteries for Tesla as well as major car manufacturers in Europe. In terms of future prospects, it was argued that the focus should be on industries that complement each other, namely ICT, biotech and medical technology, renewable energy, and the aerospace industry.
- With regards to the role of governments in advancing economic cooperation between the two countries, the promotion of economic diplomacy was argued to be a primary objective of Slovakia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The role of the Slovak Investment and trade development agency SARIO in promoting further investment amongst Taiwanese companies located in Slovakia was also emphasized.

## 2 The spread of disinformation and other hybrid threats

### 2.1 Summary

During the historically first meeting of the Slovak-Taiwan Track Dialogue, experts and policymakers from Taiwan and Slovakia exchanged ideas and lessons on how to fight Chinese and Russian disinformation.

Both sides agreed that the COVID-19 pandemic has contributed to an alarming scale of hoaxes, conspiracies, and targeted disinformation campaigns which as a result contributed towards polarization of societies and growing mistrust towards institutions and the democratic system as such. At the same time, it has also contributed to the growing assertiveness of non-democratic regimes and their attempts to influence the population of democratic countries.

Based on this, it was pointed out that although Slovakia and Taiwan are geographically far away from each other they share similar experiences and approaches on how to deal with this phenomenon.

As both sides face growing disinformation activities carried out by state and non-state actors, the discussion focused on outlining the governmental policies of both countries, their strong points, and vulnerabilities. In the case of both Slovakia and Taiwan, the role of civil society was emphasized as it plays an important role in combating disinformation.

In Slovakia, the attention of the media and the government was originally directed to the phenomenon of disinformation by civil society in a so-called 'bottom up' process. In Taiwan, civil society cooperates with the government and is directly engaged in debunking false information.



As noted during the discussion, the disinformation narrative in Europe and Slovakia is focused mostly on undermining the EU and NATO unity. Both Slovakia and Taiwan face disinformation related to anti-U.S. discourse as well as conspiracy theories connected to the COVID-19 pandemic. The main disinformation threats in Slovakia and the European context, to which Slovakia belongs, were identified with sources coming mainly from Russia, Iran, and China. It is the latter one that represents a constant threat for Taiwan with or without the COVID-19 pandemic.

It was agreed that Taiwan and Slovakia should share best practices and lessons learned to find the most effective way to deal with the issue of disinformation.

Slovakia is in the process of learning and will need Taiwan's institutional and legal perspective as well as know-how on cooperation with the third sector.

On the other hand, Chinese disinformation threats have helped Taiwan gain global attention and highlight its shared democratic values with like-minded countries. Because these are themselves concerned about Chinese disinformation, they are looking to Taiwan for the expertise in addressing it.

Having little space to maneuver internationally, Taiwan is eager to work with other countries to jointly address the foreign propaganda and disinformation issue. Both sides stressed the need to foster bilateral cooperation and ensure further exchange activities related to the issue of disinformation.

## 2.2 Recommendations

- Bearing in mind the common perception of disinformation threats, both parties should strengthen their cooperation in the field of security and develop information and experience exchange mechanisms for early detection and countering China's disinformation activities. The creation of a bilateral cooperation platform for monitoring and analyzing hybrid threats could strengthen the resilience of Slovak and Taiwanese societies and become a useful instrument for coordination of governmental and non-governmental experts, researchers, and media.
- Slovakia and Taiwan are both challenged by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has contributed towards polarization of societies and growing mistrust towards institutions and the democratic system as such. There is a need in looking for coordination of efforts and activities in dealing with disinformation related to the pandemic. Having little space to maneuver internationally, Taiwan needs Slovakia's support at the EU level as regards participation on international expert forums and platforms.
- The experts evaluated Slovakia's current government's efforts in the process of updating its security strategy that sees the fight against hybrid threats and disinformation as one of the priorities. It was argued, that the biggest challenge for Slovakia lies in improving cross-sector governmental cooperation. Slovakia's efforts should be focused on strengthening the capacity and expertise across all the government institutions when it comes to detection and effective response to disinformation.
- As a member of the EU, Slovakia should focus its efforts on strengthening the EU policies and tools promoting the shift in security mindsets of the policymakers and stakeholders. In this context, very relevant are the European Democratic Action plan and updated Digital Services Act that deals with the regulation of social media platforms and encourages adopting new measures and more efficient

interactions between online platforms and governments. Great potential for Slovakia lies in the opportunity to cooperate with Taiwan. In particular, Slovakia should learn from its balanced and conscious approach on how to use technologies and communication, and how to improve the resilience of its communities and the state.

- It is assumed that due to Slovakia's small market, direct cooperation on disinformation with social media platforms has not been fruitful so far. Slovakia should therefore push through the EU to voice its concerns and to be heard.
- The discussion also highlighted the need to address the societal inability to identify conspiracy narratives in Slovakia. The government should therefore focus its agenda on strengthening society's critical thinking, media literacy, cyber literacy, and digital literacy – in other words, the society should learn how to exercise the so-called digital democratic citizenship. To do so multidimensional and cross-discipline discussions involving other experts, such as anthropologists, behavioral scientists, and psychologists are necessary.
- While Slovakia has to work yet on a strategy to improve the media literacy of its population, Taiwan has incorporated media literacy in the elementary and secondary curriculum. In addition to that, the Media Literacy Promotion Committee was established under the Ministry of Education of the Republic of China (Taiwan) to target different age groups: students, teachers, civilians, and government personnel. Similar educational programs were suggested during the discussions as a possible area of cooperation between Taiwan and Slovakia.
- In countering disinformation, Taiwan shows to be a good example of combining a government approach with a societal approach. In addition to the facilitation of detection, verification, and identification of disinformation, Taiwanese civil society actors are great helpers in identifying and exposing malicious content sources from China.

Slovakia should draw from Taiwan's approach by bringing together relevant government agencies, NGOs, civil society, and other actors to brainstorm ways to combat disinformation and exchange best practices.

- To reduce the influence of disinformation on the political agenda and decision-making of Slovakia, the country should address the direct involvement of certain politicians in nurturing and participating in spreading false news in order to gain political support and influence. Slovakia should consider ways to seek cooperation from a legal perspective with Taiwan, where the government's efforts are focused on creating and enforcing laws to punish disinformation actors.

## About CEIAS

The Central European Institute of Asian Studies (CEIAS) is an independent think tank based in Bratislava (Slovakia), and with branches in Olomouc (Czech Republic), and Vienna (Austria).

The main goal of CEIAS is to spread knowledge about Asia among scholars and experts in Central Europe and beyond, while also informing the public about Central European activities in Asia.

To this end, CEIAS conducts and publishes its research, organizes public seminars and conferences, supports education on Asian topics, and communicates with the local, regional, and international media.

CEIAS activities focus mainly on international relations and security studies in East, Southeast, South, and Central Asia. CEIAS cooperates with a number of experts and similar organizations in the region and beyond.

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## About SFPA

Slovak Foreign Policy Association (SFPA) is Bratislava-based foreign policy think-tank founded in 1993. Through its programs of research, seminars, workshops and publications, the SFPA spreads objective information about international relations from primary sources. In its activities SFPA:

- conducts an independent expert analyses on crucial issues of international relations and foreign policy of the Slovakia.
- publishes publications to increase awareness in the field of international relations and foreign policy of Slovakia and as a source of qualified information for both, the expert and general public;
- organizes expert events and participates in international scientific cooperation in the field of international relations and security;
- contributes to the fostering of the expert discourse on international relations and foreign policy of the Slovakia;
- creates a favorable environment for the growth of the new generation of the Slovak experts in the field of international relations;
- stimulates the interest of wider Slovak public in the global events as well as a deeper understanding of the significance of foreign policy and its link to the domestic policy.

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