

Future of Democracy: High Level Forum on Defending Against Authoritarianism

Nov. 10, 2023, Vilnius, Lithuania

Hon. Speaker Čmilytė-Nielsen of Seimas, Honorable
Foreign Minister Lipavsky of the Czech Republic, Chairs
of Foreign Affairs Committee of the three Baltic States,
Parliamentarians;
Distinguished Guests;
Ladies and gentlemen:

Good morning!

I would like to begin by thanking the organizers for
inviting me to address the Future of Democracy Forum.

Being able to visit Lithuania in person for the first time is
a dream-come-true emotional moment for me. This visit
is truly significant not only for myself, but also for the
people of Taiwan and for the friendship between Taiwan
and Lithuania.

Let me tell you how the people in Taiwan think about the
name Lithuania so that you know why I get emotional in
coming here. Lithuania is a country that fought against
Russia to regain independence and democracy. And in
the process, people in the Baltic formed a human chain in

August 1989 to make the world hear your voice—so inspirational to the Taiwanese people.

Lithuania is also the country that agreed to Taiwan to set up a representative office, and in the words of your Foreign Minister Landsbergis, “they should be able to call themselves the way they want to.” I was literally in tears when I saw him saying it in the Foreign Press Club in Australia via livestream.

The tough reality facing Taiwan is that we constantly run into difficulties just to call ourselves the way we want to, or try to participate in international organizations that no one else is excluded but Taiwan.

And Lithuania is the first country in Europe to donate Covid-19 vaccines to us at the most difficult moment during the pandemic. This is also the country with important figures frequented Taiwan to make connect and to show support, like Speaker Cmilyte-Nielsen and former president Grybauskaite. And this is the country that publishes its Indo-Pacific Strategy and calls out on the PRC use of force a red-line.

It is not an overstatement that this is one country that has captured the hearts of the Taiwanese people. To us,

Lithuania may not be a big country, but you are definitely a moral superpower.

I know my dear friend Foreign Minister Lipavsky may be wondering what about the Czech Republic. Well I also want to make it clear that the Czech Republic in my mind and many other Taiwanese is also a moral superpower that speaks volume on the international stage when it comes to our shared values, and it is also a huge supporter of Taiwan. I can never thank Czechia enough. So I think we are good now, Mr. Minister.

Among all factors, I would like to point out that the bond between Taiwan and Lithuania, and many other EU countries is rooted in our common commitment to safeguard freedom, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. Both Taiwan and Lithuania and other frontline states in Europe are proud democracies that emerged from a struggle for self-determination and human rights, despite that we are on the front line, living under the shadow of authoritarian expansionism.

We understand the value of democracy and the rule of law, as well as the essential role they play in fostering peace, stability, and prosperity. Nevertheless, we also recognize that these cherished principles are not to be

taken for granted; they must be defended, upheld, and advanced.

As I speak, Russia's invasion of Ukraine still ravages on, and has demonstrated the kind of devastation authoritarian regimes can cause. Such autocracies have utter contempt for human dignity. They violate the most fundamental UN tenet of peaceful settlement of international disputes, which has been a critical pillar of the rules-based international order.

That is why within moments after the war broke out, we condemned and sanctioned against Russia. The people and government of Taiwan also began providing significant humanitarian support to help the displaced Ukrainians through donation of funds to Lithuania, Poland, Czechia, and Slovakia. We did not calculate rationally what we can gain from our actions. It comes from our heart that it is the right thing to do. Dear friends, we are still providing assistance to Ukraine with the help from partners in Central and Eastern Europe. I want to thank you for helping us to help Ukraine.

Looking back, the lack of an effective response to Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, the collective naivety of the democratic world, and a reluctance to

come to terms with Russia's revisionist nature, emboldened Vladimir Putin and fueled his ambition. This has been an important lesson for all of us.

The Indo-Pacific region is also facing increasing authoritarian expansionism. China's unceasing gray-zone activities across the region, including in the Taiwan Strait, East and South China Seas, have sparked dangerous tension with Taiwan, Japan, the Philippines, and Vietnam.

Recently, Chinese military jets engaged in reckless, dangerous, and unprofessional acts with US and Canadian planes conducting freedom of overflight in the region. China's irresponsible maneuvers challenge the status quo and reveal its ambition to dominate the region.

To me, Russia will not stop at Ukraine, nor will China stop at Taiwan if we don't stop them now. Russia spoke about the Baltic states as part of its federation and not independent. It is exactly the same way we hear from the PRC leaders, who are basically pointing to different places in our region and say they are all mine. Their claims are backed up by military and economic power, and often by hybrid warfare. But if the war in Ukraine can teach us something, it is its impact that has reached

far and wide. We all suffer from it economically, no matter how far we are from the battleground.

If the global economic impact brought about by the war in Ukraine is bad, let's think about a possible war over Taiwan for a moment. Taiwan is a leading manufacturer of semiconductors, producing the bulk of the world's most advanced chips.

Additionally, Taiwan is positioned in a strategic location along the Taiwan Strait, where half of the world's goods sail through. Any conflict in the Taiwan Strait would inevitably disrupt semiconductor and related supply chains and deal a tremendous blow to the global economy.

To many analysts, the impact can be much more serious than the war in Ukraine, and we must stop the madness of the authoritarian expansionism, in Europe or in the Indo-Pacific.

To make the situation more complicated for fellow democracies nowadays, China and Russia seem to be working closer with each other to reshape the rules-based international order. They align with each other in international forums such as the United Nations, BRICS,

Shanghai Cooperation Organization etc., to dominate the bloc of the Global South. This new global strategic picture is really troublesome.

What's more worrisome is the military cooperation between China and Russia. While Russian military suffered a devastating blow in Ukraine, its Pacific military forces remain relatively intact. In the last few months, China and Russia conducted joint military exercises in the West Pacific, involving strategic bombers and large military vessels, seemingly targeting at Japan. It is evident that Xi and Putin are collaborating to realize their earlier "unlimited partnership." Global democratic community shouldn't let our guard down, as the geo-strategic environment has turned into one world and one theater. And to my fellow democracies, we should have one common vision in response: to work closely with each other to defend the values that we hold dear to our heart. United we stand, and divided we fall. Very simple.

Knowing the need for democracies to work with each other, Taiwan seeks to share our experiences as a thriving economy, overcoming adversity through embracing freedom and innovation. Our expertise in areas such as

semiconductors and cybersecurity are valuable assets in the global fight to protect democratic institutions and ensure free and open exchange of ideas. It is especially important when fellow democracies now understand the importance of de-risking.

Taiwan and its Central and Eastern European friends, such as Lithuania and the Czech Republic, have engaged in numerous projects aimed at forging a stronger partnership. For example, we have jointly provided humanitarian assistance and reconstruction funds to help Ukraine.

And to counter economic coercion, Taiwan and Lithuania established a Deep Tech Partnership. This has furthered our cooperation in key technology sectors to strengthen supply chain resilience, which is becoming increasingly essential in a world beleaguered by authoritarian expansionism.

The founding of the Laser Research and Innovation Center in Taiwan and semiconductor cooperation with Lithuanian tech company Teltonika demonstrate how our partnership makes the most out of our comparative advantages.

Here I would like to extend my wholehearted appreciation to Lithuania. Despite enormous pressure, you have decided to deepen ties with Taiwan. I am sure your determination will inspire more European countries to follow suit and strengthen international support for democracies on the frontline.

On our part, we will continue to coordinate with other like-minded countries to ease off the pressure from the undue trade sanctions in a true spirit of democratic partnership. I am also optimistic that the discussions in Brussels on anti-economic coercion instrument will bear fruit soon.

From where Taiwan stands in the Indo-Pacific, we are glad to see more European governments now addressing the danger posed by the PRC expansionism. In the strategic realm, more and more countries have adopted their Indo-Pacific Strategies to connect with democracies in our region. Militarily, members of NATO, such as the United States, the United Kingdom, France and Canada, have deployed military vessels to conduct frequent and regular freedom of navigation operations in the Indo-Pacific region, including the Taiwan Strait. Deterrence is not just in the talk, it is in action, and is appreciated.

Here I would like to put it strongly, even though Central and Eastern European countries may not be able to send any military asset to our region, your constant vocal opposition to the threat by authoritarianism, and explicit support of fellow democracies on the frontline, is utterly important, and is just as valuable in deterring aggression.

My dear friends, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to quote Foreign Minister Landsbergis again. He stated that “freedom-loving people should look out for each other” when Lithuania announced the donation of COVID-19 vaccines to Taiwan. My fellow citizens in Taiwan were so deeply and unbelievably moved by the kind gesture that they rushed out to buy Lithuanian beer and chocolate to show appreciation.

To me, this is the true spirit of defending democracy: unity. Just like the Indo-Pacific democracies and Europe stand together to push back on the Russian aggression against Ukraine, we now feel strongly our European partners are telling the PRC to stop its aggression.

Democracies including Taiwan and Lithuania now stand in unity to foster a world where people can shape their own destinies, free from oppression and fear. And in unity, we will continue to stand tall.

Thank you.