

**Chinese politics & policy**

## China downgrades diplomatic relations with Lithuania over Taiwan ties

Beijing says Baltic state's decision to deepen links with Taipei challenges 'one China' policy



Lithuania allowed Taiwan to open a representative office in Vilnius last week, a level below official diplomatic recognition but a sign of closer relations © AP

**Edward White** in Rotorua and **Richard Milne** in Oslo 6 HOURS AGO

China has downgraded diplomatic relations with Lithuania after the Baltic country upgraded economic ties with Taiwan, in a sign of how EU member states risk retaliation from Beijing if they seek to deepen links with Taipei.

China said its decision to reduce relations with Lithuania from ambassadorial to chargé d'affaires level was to protest against the country's decision to open a representative office in Taipei last week. A representative office does not equate to official diplomatic relations but is an indication of deeper ties.

“This act openly creates the false impression of ‘one China, one Taiwan’ in the world, renounces the political commitment made by Lithuania in the communiqué on the establishment of diplomatic relations with the People’s Republic of China, undermines China’s sovereignty and territorial integrity, and grossly interferes in China’s internal affairs,” China’s foreign affairs ministry said on Sunday.

Beijing claims Taiwan is an inalienable part of China’s sovereign territory and regularly opposes formal engagement with the democratically elected government in Taipei.

Lithuania said it regretted Beijing’s decision and reaffirmed its commitment to the “one China policy”.

Beijing's latest reaction towards Lithuania comes amid a [broader trend of warming relations](#) between central and eastern European countries and Taiwan.

Vilnius believes it has been singled out by China even though most EU member states and western governments have similar arrangements with Taiwan.

The establishment of mutual representative offices with Taiwan had already [caused a recall](#) of the Chinese and Lithuanian ambassadors from the respective capitals.

“We urge the Lithuanian side to immediately put right its mistake and not to underestimate the Chinese people’s strong resolve, will and capability to defend national sovereignty and territorial integrity,” the Chinese foreign ministry said.

Taiwan is viewed by many security experts and officials as a [dangerous flashpoint](#) between the US and China. Beijing has [ratcheted up pressure on Taiwan](#) across diplomatic, military and economic realms since 2016 when the Democratic Progressive party led by President Tsai Ing-wen took office, replacing the more Beijing-friendly Kuomintang.

Gitanas Nauseda, Lithuania’s president, [told the Financial Times](#) in August that the Baltic state would not back down. He added that while the country was committed to defending democratic values, the approach “should not bring additional tensions”.

Vilnius has taken an increasingly assertive stand towards China in recent months. The government has pulled out of the 17+1 group established by Beijing for dealing with central and eastern European countries, condemned China’s treatment of Uyghurs in Xinjiang and banned Huawei from its telecom infrastructure.

Some governments and lawmakers are reconsidering their links with China, as they have become increasingly fearful of Beijing’s authoritarian tendencies and disillusioned over economic opportunities in the world’s second-largest economy.

A group of members of the European parliament visited Taipei this month to assert their [support for Taiwan](#).

Separately, Australia’s defence minister said it was “[inconceivable](#)” that the country would not support the US in a campaign to defend Taiwan.

regime of Alexander Lukashenko has lured thousands of migrants to its border.

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