

## Press Release

### The 2019 Global Cooperation Training Framework on “Defending Democracy Through Media Literacy II” Opening Ceremony

The 2019 Global Cooperation and Training Framework (GCTF) on “Defending Democracy Through Media Literacy II” International Workshop opened today (9/10). The event is co-hosted by the Taiwan Foundation for Democracy (TFD), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), the American Institute in Taiwan (AIT), the National Democratic Institute (NDI), the International Republican Institute (IRI), the Japan-Taiwan Exchange Association, and the Swedish Trade and Investment Council in Taipei.

TFD Chairman Jia-chyuan Su said in his opening remarks that in recent years, we have started to become aware that the amount of resources that certain authoritarian regimes have poured into foreign propaganda and social media platforms is beyond our imagination.

“In the case of Hong Kong’s recent protests, we’ve witnessed that the Chinese government has used state power to manipulate certain media outlets in order to obfuscate what really happened in the city..., aiming to influence how internet users perceive the protests in Hong Kong and sway the international public opinion,” he said.

Taiwan is the main battlefield where foreign forces engage in influence operations through disinformation and harm democratic values, Chairman Su emphasized. “With the general election in Taiwan closing in, we are deeply worried that the dissemination of disinformation would continue to worsen, as the final goal of those behind the malign dissemination is to impair Taiwan’s democracy and freedom.”

Foreign Minister Jaushieh Joseph Wu said the spread of disinformation is posing a serious threat to our democracy, especially when Taiwan approaches the presidential election early next year. “Secretary of State Mike Pompeo openly praised Taiwan as a reliable partner, a democratic success story and a force for good in the world. I am here to tell you we are determined to safeguard our democracy, and I am confident that by working together with like-minded countries and partners, we will overcome this challenge.”

Japan’s Deputy Representative Nishiumi Shigehiro called for a balanced approach to tackle the issues of disinformation, saying that while the value of democracy is for voters to choose their own leaders

based on correct information, we also have to be careful not to do it at the expense of the freedom of expression, also the very foundation of democracy.

Swedish Representative Håkan Jevrell said the Swedish foreign ministry has recently launched a democracy drive that will be affecting all areas of the country's foreign policy. In this event, he cautioned that while we know many actors use information to have impact on our behaviors, which could sometimes be harmless such as making us to buy certain consumer goods, the authoritarian states are also using the tools to undermine our democracy. "We must be aware and act...and continue educating ourselves and vaccinate ourselves against harmful information."

NDI Vice President Shari Bryan lauded Taiwan for its remarkable democratic development and progress that has been made in the past three decades." But there are challenges to our world now where technological advances have fundamentally changed how we access and share information" and exposed us to possible internal and external manipulations. "The threats and challenges are complex and evolving everyday and there is no one-size-fits-all solution," she said. "We have to work together to equip our leaders in each community and country with the knowledge and the tools they need to assess their information environment... to counter the efforts of anti-democratic actors."

AIT Director William Brent Christensen said the United States National Security Strategy describes a geopolitical competition is going on between free and repressive regimes and governments, and "nowhere is this truer than information battlefield." He said that the US is grappling with the spread of disinformation particular as foreign actors seek to use social media to influence our elections, divide the America public, and undermine confidence in our democratic institutions. "Taiwan is also on the frontline of this battle and faces the same challenges," he added.

"Responding to the challenge of disinformation is something no one society or government can do alone," Director Christensen said, adding that we need to have fruitful discussions and hear from the participants about the policies and programs that succeeded in their countries, the threats they've encountered, and also the missteps.

Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Scott Busby said there are few better places than Taiwan to have the discussions on defending democracy through media literacy, both because of the success Taiwan had in building the right to respect democracy as well as the threat posed by outside forces. He commended Taiwan for its commitment to universally accepted human rights and democratic principles, focusing on respecting dignity of every individual, which includes the fundamental

freedoms of speech, religion, press, association, and peaceful assembly. “These freedoms must be vigorously protected throughout the entire Indo-Pacific region, including Hong Kong.”

“Taiwan’s 2020 elections are just a few short months away, and China once again seeks to use disinformation to undermine the vote, divide the people, and sow seed of doubt in democratic system. China has invested heavily to develop more sophisticated ways to anonymously disseminate disinformation through a number of channels, including social media. As their malign methods evolved, the motivation remains the same: to weaken democracy and the freedom that citizens of Taiwan have come to enjoy after so many hard years of struggle,” Mr. Busby cautioned.

Jakub Kalensky, a senior fellow of the Eurasian Center at the Atlantic Council focusing on disinformation campaigns initiated by Russia, delivered a 30-minute keynote speech during the opening ceremony. In the speech he outlined the penetration of Russia’s operations in Europe through online platforms but also by using journalists. “Fear” toward differences is what the operations are after, which he said the disinformers would manipulate to stir the public emotions.

Mr. Kalensky stressed that to counter the threat of disinformation, four strategic measures need to be implemented: effectively documenting the threats, raising the public awareness, repairing the weaknesses that the disinformers exploit, and finally, systematically punishing the information aggressors to dissuade any further incidence, which is “not done often but has to be done otherwise we’ll never stop information aggression.”

“Individuals who are helping spread the disinformation should be named and shamed by the media, by the politicians, by the NGOs, and by the academics. The most aggressive and the most visible propaganda should be sanctioned...Punishing the most visible propaganda and individuals participating in spreading disinformation would send a clear signal that we do not tolerate lies and hatred,” he stressed.

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