

ECFA requires more than ‘belief’

Written by Taipei Times Editorial
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The Presidential Office shot from the hip on Sunday, targeting former president Lee Teng-hui (李登輝) and retired US diplomat John Tkacik over their criticism of a proposed economic cooperation framework agreement (ECFA) between Taiwan and China.

As always, the administration of President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) adopted a tone that managed to be both condescending and insulting. While it claimed to “respect” the views of those who expressed doubts about the virtues and viability of an ECFA, it also discarded Tkacik’s position as “misleading” and not representative of the majority of “professionals.” It also said it would be happy to “explain” the trade pact to Lee, as if the statesman were not qualified to reach his own conclusions.

“Please believe me,” Ma said while promoting the ECFA in Tainan County, a comment that again encapsulates the administration’s inability to treat opponents with respect. Having failed to “explain” the advantages — and dangers — of an ECFA, having excluded a large and more suspicious segment of society and having barred foreign media from attending Ma’s first talk on the matter, the Ma administration then goes on the offensive whenever someone does not “believe” it.

When a policy such as that of an ECFA with China holds the potential for far-reaching — and possibly irreparable — consequences for the sovereignty of this nation, surely the government that advocates it should do more than ask people to “believe” it and to “believe” China’s good intentions in the matter.

Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao (溫家寶) can harp as much as he wants about Taiwan and China being “brothers” who “cannot sever their blood ties” and whose “problems [over the trade pact] will eventually be solved,” and Ma administration officials can repeat ad nauseam that they would step down if the pact included references to “one China” or resulted in increased imports of Chinese agricultural products, but the fact remains that all this is based on faith. Of course Chinese officials will not be so dumb as to be transparent about the political objectives of an ECFA — at least not in writing. The long history of Chinese pacts, however, should be enough to make us wary of Beijing’s intentions. And it is clear that Wen’s brothers are not equals, but rather part of a hierarchy in which China is the elder who calls the shots and slaps his young sibling around whenever the latter “misbehaves.”

There is no reason why Taiwanese should “believe” or “trust” the Ma administration over this major development in the nation’s history. It has failed to act with transparency and has time and again showed ineptitude in how it handles major policies. The US beef debacle and Typhoon Morakot come to mind. Even if we had reason to believe that Ma is “honest,” “sincere” and “incorruptible,” as some in the press have claimed, there are serious reasons to doubt the good character of other officials in his administration. For a multitude of very obvious reasons, we have even less cause to trust Beijing.

The Ma administration is proceeding unchecked toward the signing of an ECFA, caring little for different input and insulting those who disagree with it. Acting more like a bully than an

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honest broker, the administration is undeserving of our trust and must be forced to listen.

For far too long, opponents of an ECFA, or those who fear its consequences, have been ignored at no cost to the leadership. What this country needs now is not easily discarded comments by outsiders like Tkacik, but mobilization by Taiwanese, who are the sole owners of their nation's future.

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