

## TSU vows to go on after poll is rejected

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The Taiwan Solidarity Union (TSU) yesterday vowed to continue to push for a referendum on the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (ECFA) after the Referendum Review Committee — for the second time — killed its proposal to let the public have a say on the recently signed cross-strait pact.

The committee yesterday rejected the TSU's proposal in a 10 to two vote, saying the party failed to present a convincing argument.

"We have believed all along that the right to a referendum is a basic right of the people. We won't give up until this is achieved," TSU Chairperson Huang Kun-huei (黃昆輝) said following the committee's decision.

The verdict has also prompted a rare outburst from former president Lee Teng-hui (李登輝), who condemned the decision as undemocratic and accused President Ma Ying-jeou's (馬英九) administration of interfering with the committee, which is supposed to be non-partisan.

"The democratic spirit that I established for Taiwan during my administration is all but gone," Lee said. "The Ma government has forgotten about the people's needs and Taiwan's sovereignty. If we continue on like this, Taiwan has no future."

The 87 year-old former president also spoke against the ECFA, saying that a referendum was essential because the trade pact would lead to a "one China" market and subject the country's future to increasing Chinese control.

"No matter my age, I will still come out to [oppose the pact]," he said over the deal's potential implications on Taiwan's sovereignty and democracy.

Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) Chairperson Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) also denounced the committee's decision, calling it another "large set-back for Taiwan's democracy."

"We believe that not only will the ECFA impact Taiwan's income gap, but that it will also touch on this country's strategic position and future development. It's an important issue that deserves to be put to a public vote," she said.

Yesterday's verdict was the latest in a long line of rejections by the committee, which had previously rejected similar applications by both the DPP and the TSU, all based on alleged contradictions between the question and text of the proposal.

On June 3, the committee voted down the TSU's application for a referendum on the question: "Do you agree that the government should sign an ECFA with China?"

The TSU made a second proposal with the same question on June 30, a day after Taiwan

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and China signed the ECFA. That attempt was turned down yesterday.

“A referendum proposed by the people should be in opposition with the government’s policy direction,” Chao Yung-mau (蔡榮茂), chairman of the committee, told a news conference after a three-and-a-half hour meeting.

“However, with the way the question is asked in the proposed referendum, the government’s current policies would not have to be reversed even if the referendum were passed ... hence, it does not meet the qualification of a referendum as an expression of public approval or disapproval on a major policy as stipulated in the Referendum Act (公投法),” Chao said.

Chao said another reason the committee members voted it down was because Huang apparently is opposed to ECFA — according to what he stated as reasons to propose the referendum — however, the question asks whether voters agree with the government’s plan to sign the ECFA.

“This is contradicting and could cause confusion to voters,” Chao said. “The TSU may appeal the decision, or submit a new referendum proposal on the issue if it wishes to do so.”

Executive secretary of the committee Teng Tien-yu (滕天裕) said eight of the 21 committee members did not take part in the meeting because they had other engagements or were out of the country. The chairman did not cast a vote.

Committee members Chen Miao-fen (陳妙芬) and Kuo Lin-yung (郭林榮), who voted for the referendum, said in a written statement that the proposal met all criteria of a referendum and should not be blocked.

While the TSU has said it would submit another referendum proposal in the coming weeks, it is unclear how long the party, which regards Lee as its spiritual leader, can continue its efforts.

Speaking privately, TSU officials expressed worries on the heavy financial toll the referendum proposals have taken on its annual budget of NT\$23 million (US\$720,000), mostly acquired through donations as it does not qualify for government subsidies due to its size.

Each proposal that it sends in for review by the committee has to comprise of at least 86,000 petition forms as required by the Referendum Law. If passed by the committee, it would subsequently have to gather a total of 860,000 signatures before its proposal can be put to a nationwide vote.

Currently, the agreement is pending a review by the legislature and is widely expected to be given the go-ahead before the end of the month and becomes valid next year.

Opposition requests for a clause-by-clause vote on the ECFA have so far been rebuffed.

Source: [Taipei Times - 2010/08/12](#)