

Taiwan shines in anti-graft index

Written by Hsu Jen-hui 許建輝

Friday, 26 November 2021 06:05

Transparency International on Thursday last week released its global Government Defense Anti-Corruption Index. Taiwan shone among the 85 countries considered in the report, as it was awarded 70 credits, far exceeding the average score of 30. Taiwan ranked sixth, sharing the spot with Germany.

The index grouped the assessed country in six bands, ranging from A — very low corruption risk — to band F — critical corruption risk.

New Zealand was the only country in band A, and Taiwan and the UK were among the eight countries in band B, signifying a low corruption risk. This is the same allocation that Taiwan received the previous two times it was evaluated, in 2013 and 2015.

In this year's evaluation, Australia, Canada, France, Japan, Singapore, South Korea and the US were all in band C, representing moderate risk.

China was only awarded 28 points, which placed it in band E, signifying very high risk.

The index evaluated each country's risk of corruption in five areas: political, financial, personnel, operational and procurement.

For example, it looked at whether there is a robust democratic oversight mechanism, whether there is a legal framework for defense expenditure and management of disposed of military equipment, whether military personnel are given anti-corruption awareness training, whether there is effective oversight of corruption and whether national defense procurement is controlled.

It used more than 70 evaluation questions and indices, all of which are first self-assessed by each country taking part in the report and then evaluated by academics and specialists familiar with the country in question.

Transparency International also sent staff to the countries to conduct in situ assessments, and points were allotted in a systematic process according to scientific standards.

The rigorous process has earned the assessment a reputation for reliability and accuracy.

This year's report pointed out that Taiwan has a strong democratic system, although China talks of peaceful unification and has never renounced the possibility of forcing Taiwan to unify through military means.

The Sino-US tensions of the past several years have raised the temperature in the Taiwan Strait, leaving Taiwan with no choice but to rapidly upgrade its defensive capabilities and invest heavily in national defense and procure weapons.

Transparency International views Taiwan's democratic and legislative oversight mechanisms and its robust auditing system favorably, and assesses the political risk of corruption in the defense sector as low.

Taiwan's national defense budget, expenditure items and cost are transparent, and the financial data are publicly accessible, both of which considerably reduce the financial risk, too.

Moreover, Taiwan's comprehensive regulations governing military personnel make the system very alert to where risk of corruption might arise.

The report also notes how seriously Taiwan's military regards ethics and anti-corruption training, and its only recommendations were the need for more vigilance to increase awareness of corruption and that a more strategic and progressive action plan should be implemented.

It also highlights that military procurements in Taiwan are extremely political and sensitive, and

that the US is the main weapons provider. Given the huge national defense procurement expenditures, the report recommended that the government establish a more transparent, competitive procurement mechanism with more comprehensive oversight.

Taiwan should be pleased with the report's approval and should heed its recommendations.

The Ministry of National Defense could, for example, seek to improve the quality and content of its anti-corruption education program and divest itself of dogmatic slogans, shaping the integrity and trustworthiness of the organizational culture of the military.

Regarding the establishment of a strategic and progressive anti-corruption action plan, the government could look at the sections on bribery risk evaluation, anti-graft policy and execution plans in the ISO 37001 standard for anti-bribery management systems, and explore how these can be applied in Taiwan's national defense context.

Regarding procurement contracts and process control, the government has over the past few years been promoting an "integrity platform" for major procurement projects, hoping to make it more open and transparent through mutual communication and to significantly reduce the risk of corruption.

The ministry has yet to develop its own integrity platform, which could be introduced to nonconfidential procurement projects in the future.

The ministry should look into the report's recommendations and to take the good work it has been doing to the next level.

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Translated by Paul Cooper

Source: [Taipei Times - Editorials 2021/11/26](#)