

President, DPP chairperson to hold debate on ECFA

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A highly anticipated debate between President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) and Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) Chairwoman Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) is scheduled to take place before the end of this month, representatives from both sides said yesterday.

The two will square off on issues surrounding an economic cooperation framework agreement (ECFA) that the Ma administration wants to sign with China, but which the DPP strongly opposes.

The decision was reached during a meeting yesterday afternoon between Presidential Office -Secretary-General Liao Liou-yi (廖力宜) and DPP Secretary-General Su Jia-chyuan (蘇嘉元).

Both sides agreed that the debate would be organized and broadcast by the Public Television System (PTS).

Presidential Office Spokesman Lo Chih-chiang (羅智強) said the administration has always been “open” to the format of the planned meeting, so it did not take long to reach an agreement. Lo said PTS would be the best broadcaster to arrange the event and televise the debate, adding that the station had already agreed.

On a trip to the South Pacific last week, Ma, who also doubles as chairman of the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT), said he was willing to talk with Tsai about an ECFA. Lo said on Monday that Ma was willing to engage in “dialogue” with Tsai.

Liao telephoned Su on Monday afternoon.

As the DPP urged the government to provide all related information before the debate, Lo yesterday said that everything would be done to ensure the opposition has access to as much information as possible. He expressed confidence that public understanding would benefit greatly from a “rational dialogue” between Ma and Tsai.

Asked in what capacity Ma would attend the debate, Lo said such semantics were not important and urged the DPP to refrain from dwelling on the matter.

With the public sharply divided over the issue and polls showing that the vast majority still do not understand the agreement, the DPP views the debate as a potential game-changing gambit that could enable it to gain political traction with its demand for a referendum.

DPP Spokesman Tsai Chi-chang (蔡智彰) said Tsai Ing-wen plans to ask the government to clarify its position and respond to public concerns over the controversial agreement.

“We hope the government will provide us with the same information they have, so neither of us has to waste too much time focusing on statistics,” Tsai Chi-chang said.

Tsai said a critical component of the debate would be Ma’s performance and whether he is

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able to “make the government’s position clear and convince the public.”

The debate is one of the DPP’s key demands on an ECFA. The opposition party is also pushing for a referendum and more legislative oversight of the agreement before it is signed, which is expected at the end of June. The DPP legislative caucus also asked its KMT counterpart to engage in a debate on an ECFA.

KMT caucus whip Lin Yi-shih (林益世) accepted the challenge, saying that an open debate on an ECFA on the legislative floor would be no problem.

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