

First televised debate on ECFA ends in disagreement

Written by Taipei Times

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The first televised debate on a proposed economic framework cooperation agreement (ECFA) with China yesterday ended with the two sides still disagreeing on key issues including free trade, sovereignty and the net benefits of the agreement.

However, a poll of the audience showed more people switching to opposing the proposed pact.

The two hour debate featured former Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) legislators Chuang Suo-hang (蔡素芬) and Julian Kuo (郭俊傑) against Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) Legislator Lai Shyh-bao (賴士葆) and Bureau of Foreign Trade Director-General Huang Chih-peng (黃智蓬).

Defending the government's position on the controversial pact, Huang described the pact as vital, saying: "It's a matter of how well we negotiate the agreement, not whether we should negotiate it."

Inking the pact would "greatly" help Taiwan sign free-trade agreements (FTA) with other countries, Huang said, adding that some trading partners have already indicated that they would be willing to sign an FTA with Taiwan once "cross-strait political tensions diminish."

"However, I am unable to disclose which countries these are," he said.

Huang said Taiwan's negotiating team had already informed its Chinese counterparts of the government's intention to push forward with other FTAs.

However, the former DPP lawmakers contended that the government had focused too much on the Chinese negotiations, saying that although the DPP was not against free trade, "globalization does not equal sinification."

"If Taiwan signs this agreement with China and China continues to sign free-trade agreements with the rest of the world, it would mean that Chinese companies can access the entire world while Taiwanese companies will be limited to just China," Kuo said.

Criticizing the government for not making progress on any other FTAs, Kuo called on the administration of President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) to reject the ECFA if China continued to oppose Taiwan signing agreements with other nations.

Kuo said the two major problems facing Taiwan today continue to be a lack of domestic investment and the relatively high unemployment rate, both of which the ECFA not only fails to address, but would likely exacerbate.

The two sides also sparred on whether the ECFA would undermine Taiwan's sovereignty and increase its dependence on China.

While the KMT representatives said politics and the economy should be viewed separately,

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the DPP side pointed to comments made by Chinese government officials who have said an ECFA could aid cross-strait unification.

One question posed to participants on the possible impact of an ECFA on Taiwan's sovereignty, asked if they thought a case last year where Chinese government agencies restricted the flow of Chinese tourists to Kaohsiung after the city invited the Dalai Lama to visit was a case of China using economics to pursue political objectives.

Lai said the government would control any potential Chinese interference and also step up monitoring to ensure similar incidents did not take place after the ECFA was signed.

Political analysts were divided on who won the debate, with some saying the government had clarified its position on the issue and others saying they remained unconvinced about the link between the ECFA and the signing of other FTAs.

“Not only did the KMT lose due to President Ma Ying-jeou's rigid stance that the ECFA must be signed, the Bureau of Foreign Trade failed to make itself clear on how an ECFA will lead to other free-trade agreements,” said Hung Tsai-lung (洪錫麟), an associate research fellow at the Taiwan Institute of Economic Research.

A poll of audience members before and after the debate showed that the former DPP lawmakers did manage to change the minds of some.

The audience, made up mainly of university students, had originally polled nine to seven in support of the agreement. However, another poll half way through the debate showed support for the agreement had dropped to one in favor and 14 against, with one undecided.

After the conclusion of the debate, 10 audience members said they were now against the agreement with five in support and one undecided.

DPP officials told the Taipei Times that Chuang and Kuo took part in the debate did so of their own accord and without party backing.

Source: [Taipei Times 2010/04/06](#)