

Students hold nationwide debate on ECFA

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The debate over a controversial trade pact Taipei intends to sign with China entered the classroom yesterday, as students from nine universities met to debate whether the government should move to sign the agreement.

The event, held at National Taiwan University (NTU) by the pro-independence Northern Taiwan Society, saw students raise concerns that an economic cooperation framework agreement (ECFA) with China could have a negative impact on their future career prospects and more fragile Taiwanese industries.

A debate team led by Lin Yu-lun (林育倫), a student of Chinese literature at NTU, said the issue was polarized because the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) government had yet to fully reveal the details on an ECFA and how it would affect Taiwan's economy.

Other students — the vast majority of whom opposed an ECFA — called on more people to rally in support of a referendum on the agreement, saying the public deserved a say on what they said was an important instrument of national policy.

A student from the Minghsin University of Science and Technology said that as “[an ECFA] will not benefit the public and instead could harm Taiwanese [interests], people should take to the streets in support of a referendum.”

DELEGATIONS

The more than a dozen university delegates included representatives from as far away as Kaohsiung, with students from the Kaohsiung Medical University and I-Shou University.

A number of high school students and university alumni associations were also in the audience.

This was the second student debate organized by the Taiwan Northern Society on an ECFA, which it opposes on the grounds that an influx of cheaper competing goods from China would have an adverse effect on Taiwanese jobs and salaries.

The organization has also raised concerns that the agreement could increase Taiwan's economic dependence on China, which it maintains could have dangerous political side effects.

President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) and Premier Wu Den-yih (吳登毅) have called the agreement “essential,” saying it would boost Taiwan's economic growth, create jobs and increase the likelihood of Taiwan signing free-trade agreements with other trade partners.

FOREIGN VIEWS

The topic of whether Taiwan should sign an ECFA with China also attracted the interest of foreign students studying in Taiwan, who took part in a separate event that began on

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Saturday.

A team made up of four -students from NTU's International Chinese Language Program has signed up for a three-day debate among political science majors from universities nationwide.

The inter-school debate is usually held annually.

National Chengchi University (NCCU) is the organizer of this year's debate, in which teams will argue on whether Taiwan should sign a trade pact with China.

Asked why he signed up for the activity, Jeffrey Hartsough of the US said in Mandarin he did so because an ECFA is "a very -significant issue that concerns the future of a country."

Hartsough said that while having ordinary conversations in Mandarin is easy, debating in Mandarin can be challenging. As a result, he has been practicing with his classmates for several weeks.

The debate, which concludes today, attracted students from NTU, NCCU, Soochow University and Tamkang University, as well as the Republic of China Military Academy, which is participating for the first time and sent three teams.

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