

Opposition vows '10-year' ECFA fight

Written by Taipei Times
Saturday, 05 June 2010 08:28 -

Opposition parties yesterday vowed to begin a "10-year resistance" against the government's plan to sign an economic cooperation framework agreement (ECFA) with China, including organizing large-scale protests calling for a referendum on the controversial pact.

The Executive Yuan's Referendum Review Committee on Thursday night voted 12-4 against an opposition-supported referendum proposal asking voters whether they agreed that the government should sign an ECFA with China. The committee said the question did not fall under what was allowed under the Referendum Act (公投法).

Both the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) and the Taiwan Solidarity Union (TSU) assailed the decision and raised concerns of interference by the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) government.

Minutes after the decision was announced, the TSU — which initiated the referendum proposal — released a sternly worded statement saying that the committee's decision went against the Constitution.

"The verdict is completely unacceptable," TSU Chairperson Huang Kun-huei (黃昆輝) said. "The committee's reasons for rejecting the proposal are unreasonable, illegal and unconstitutional."

Although this was the second ECFA referendum proposal rejected by the committee, the TSU vowed to immediately begin preparations for another — a move the DPP said it would support.

"Thursday's decision is proof of the government denying people their basic civil rights," DPP spokesperson Lin Yu-chang (林郁昌) said.

Last year, the DPP-initiated referendum proposal, which would have asked voters if they agreed that the government should hold a referendum before signing an ECFA, was also rejected by the committee on the grounds that it was based on a hypothetical scenario that did not exist.

A similar proposal by DPP lawmakers calling for the passage of a bill creating an ECFA referendum was blocked by the KMT--controlled legislature in April.

DPP Legislator Ker Chien-ming (柯建銘) said that based on experience, "we knew that [the TSU's] ECFA referendum proposal would be rejected due to pressure from the Chinese government on the KMT."

"However, this will not stop the DPP and the TSU from working hard and continuing to push for an ECFA referendum," he said.

The DPP said it had begun plans to hold a large rally calling for an ECFA referendum later this month. Details of the planned rally could be announced by next Wednesday.

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Ahead of the large-scale protest, the opposition is holding a referendum rally at Kaohsiung City's Glory Pier today, with DPP Chairperson Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) and Kaohsiung Mayor Chen Chu (陳菊) giving speeches.

The DPP and the TSU say that a plebiscite is necessary to give the public a say in the controversial trade agreement.

Critics of the trade pact have also said that based on WTO rules, Taiwan and China would be forced to open up to 90 or 95 percent of their markets to cross-strait trade within 10 years, if an ECFA were signed.

Saying that the influx of cheaper Chinese goods could have a serious impact on Taiwanese jobs and vulnerable industries, Julian Kuo (郭俊雄), spokesman of the DPP's ECFA response team, said the party would begin a "10-year resistance" against the effects of an ECFA, if it were signed.

President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) and his administration have maintained that an ECFA with China, which aims to lower cross-strait tariffs, would benefit Taiwan's export-based economy and aid its chances of signing FTAs with other countries. The Chinese foreign ministry said on Tuesday, however, that Beijing "firmly objects" to Taiwan signing official agreements with China's diplomatic allies.

The Ma government has also said that benefits from the agreement would far outweigh its potential affect on Taiwan's vulnerable industries. The president has said that he would establish a 10-year, NT\$95 billion (US\$2.94 billion) fund to aid industries that might be hard hit by the agreement.

Meanwhile, the Washington-based Formosan Association for Public Affairs (FAPA), the largest organization representing the Taiwanese community in the US, also condemned the committee's decision and said it was "dismayed" at the outcome.

"This is another blow to democracy in Taiwan," FAPA president Bob Yang (楊慶堃) said. "A referendum is a basic mechanism by the people of Taiwan to express their views on the very controversial ECFA proposal by the Ma government. It is unconscionable for the Ma government to block this proposal."

US government sources refused to comment on the latest development, saying it was an internal issue and Washington did not want to interfere.

However, the administration of US President Barack Obama is basically in favor of an ECFA and closer Taiwan-China ties. Over the past few months, US administration officials speaking in private have appeared to be concerned that a referendum would prove to be a setback for the proposed trade pact.

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FAPA is now in touch with the White House and with members of the US Congress, urging them to “prevail on the authorities in Taiwan to lift the blockage and respect the basic principles of democracy.”

However, the effort is unlikely to have much impact on Obama and the ruling Democrats, who are largely responsible for holding up a US free trade pact with Taiwan.

“We Taiwanese-Americans, together with the people in Taiwan, have worked hard for our democracy and we will not let the Ma government take it away,” Yang said.

Also See: [Premier supports referendum decision](#)

Also See: [Activists, academics pan decision on referendum](#)

The 21 members of the Executive Yuan's Referendum Review Committee

□ Chao Yung-mau (蔡榮茂) — presiding over the meeting, so he did not vote, Chairman of the committee, dean of the College of Social Sciences, National Taiwan University.

Those who voted against the Taiwan Solidarity Union's (TSU) referendum proposal:

□ Bruce Liao (廖正興) — associate professor, Department of Law, National Chengchi University.

□ Ho Hsu-ling (何素玲) — attorney

□ Wu Yung-chien (吳永建) — professor, Department of Law, Shih Hsin University

□ Francis Hu (胡文輝) — associate professor, Department of Political Science, Tunghai University

□ Yu Ching-shin (于正新) — research fellow, Election Study Center, National Chengchi University

□ Ji Jun-chen (紀俊辰) — professor, Department of Tourism, Ming Chuan University

□ Shiau Chyuan-jenq (蕭煥堯) — professor, Department of Political Science, National Taiwan University / Member of the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT)-affiliated think tank National Policy Foundation

□ Chao Mei-chun (趙美純) — attorney

□ Chen Yuan-ying (陳元英) — member, the Civil Service Protection and Training Commission,

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Examination Yuan

□ Swei Duh-ching (ꠂꠂꠂꠂ) — associate professor, Graduate Institute of Development Studies, National Chengchi University; member of the KMT-affiliated think tank National Policy Foundation

□ Chu Hsin-min (ꠂꠂꠂꠂ) — professor, Department of Diplomacy, National Chengchi University

□ Carl Shaw (ꠂꠂꠂꠂ) — research fellow, Research Center for Humanities and Social Sciences, Academia Sinica

Those who voted for the TSU's referendum proposal:

□ Yang Wan-ying (ꠂꠂꠂꠂ) — associate professor, Department of Political Science, National Chengchi University

□ Kuo Lin-yung (ꠂꠂꠂꠂ) — attorney and former Taiwan Solidarity Union legislator

□ Chen Don-yun (ꠂꠂꠂꠂ) — associate professor, Department of Public Administration, National Chengchi University

□ Chen Miao-fen (ꠂꠂꠂꠂ) — associate professor, Department of Law, National Taiwan University

Cast a blank ballot:

□ Chiang Min-hsiu (ꠂꠂꠂꠂ) — professor, Department of Public Administration, National Chengchi University

Left the meeting early and did not cast a ballot:

□ Arthur Ding (ꠂꠂꠂꠂ) — professor, Department of Political Science, National Chengkung University

Those absent from the meeting:

□ Liao Da-chi (ꠂꠂꠂꠂ) — professor and director, Institute of Political Science, National Sun Yat-sen University

□ Lee Pei-shan (ꠂꠂꠂꠂ) — associate professor, Department of Political Science, National Chungcheng University

— PREPARED BY STAFF REPORTER LOA IOK-SIN

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