

TSU to relaunch ECFA referendum

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The Taiwan Solidarity Union (TSU) announced yesterday that it would submit a new referendum proposal tomorrow that aims to ask voters whether they agree with the government's signing of a controversial trade pact with China.

Unhappy that the Central Election Commission (CEC) rejected a similar proposal earlier this month, the opposition party said it had gathered the necessary 86,000 petition forms to launch the first phase of a new referendum drive and did so faster than expected.

"The response we've received was overwhelming," said TSU director Chou Ni-an (周尼安), one of the organizers of the drive. "On Saturday alone, we collected more than 20,000 petition forms, bringing our total to 110,000."

The referendum push comes as cross-strait negotiators are expected to finish their talks and sign an economic cooperation framework agreement (ECFA) in Chongqing, China, today.

Opposition parties, including the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) and the TSU, oppose the agreement over fears that an influx of less expensive Chinese goods could undermine Taiwanese jobs, hurt fragile industries and lock Taiwan into a "one China" market.

Tens of thousands of protesters took to the streets in Taipei on Saturday, joining calls by the two opposition parties for a referendum on an ECFA. So far, two ECFA referendum proposals — one by the DPP and another by the TSU — have been rejected by the Referendum Review Committee.

The committee on June 3 said the referendum question and content contradicted one another, a decision that TSU Chairperson Huang Kun-huei (黃昆輝) has appealed.

This time, while the TSU does not plan to alter the text of the question, which asks voters whether they agree that the government should sign a ECFA with China, party officials said they would tweak the content to avoid having the committee deliver the same verdict.

"Our question ... and the content will be styled in a way that the public can freely say whether they agree or disagree with an ECFA," Chou said.

The DPP said yesterday it would back the proposal.

"We respect the TSU proposal and the DPP will provide assistance if needed," DPP spokesperson Tsai Chi-chang (蔡智昌) said.

Under the Referendum Act (公職人員選舉罷免法), the Central Election Commission has 15 days to either accept the proposal and pass it on to the committee or send it back to the organizers pending a correction of any errors found. The committee will then make a decision on whether to give the

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go-ahead within a month.

If passed, the TSU will have to gather 860,000 petition forms — 5 percent of the voting public in the last presidential election — before the proposal can be put to the ballot box.

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