

Think tank urges ECFA debate

Written by Taipei Times

Wednesday, 14 July 2010 08:07 -

Taiwan Thinktank yesterday urged the legislature to debate the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (ECFA) article by article, to abolish what it called the “unconstitutional” cross-strait economic cooperation committee and establish a supervisory mechanism to oversee future cross-strait accords. It said failure to do so would give undue power to “unaccountable” and “un-elected” individuals.

Taiwan Thinktank executive director Cheng Li-chiun (鄭麗君) called on the legislature to hold public hearings and debate the accord article-by-article and vote on each provision.

The legislature should also annul Article 11 of the pact, which she said was “unconstitutional.” The provision stipulates the two sides establish a cross-strait economic cooperation committee to handle negotiations, implementation and interpretation of the agreement or disputes resulting from it.

If the legislature refused, she said, it should take the initiative to request an interpretation from the Council of Grand Justices on the constitutionality of the committee. She also urged the legislature to establish a mechanism to supervise future cross-strait accords.

Cheng made the calls during a forum organized by the think tank in Taipei.

Singling out Article 11, Cheng said Taiwan got a worse deal compared with trade agreements signed by China and ASEAN countries and between China and Hong Kong.

“Once established, the committee will become an evil backstage manipulator with unrivaled power,” she said. “It is not the only article in the agreement, but the legislature cannot debate nor can the public have any say.”

Cheng said the article lacked information on how the committee would be established, how many representatives each side could send and whether it would be subject to legislative review

“The devil is in the details,” Cheng said. “The commission’s position and authority are unclear. It could well become a supra-governmental organization without public accountability.”

The Bureau of Foreign Trade on Monday said the nation’s representatives to the committee would be government officials.

Turning to Article 13, Hsu Yung-ming (許雲明), a political scientist at Soochow University, said it was tantamount to a blank check, as it failed to specify that future supplementary agreements should be subject to legislative oversight. Article 13 states that all appendices of ECFA and subsequent agreements constitute part of the trade pact.

While Article 14 stipulates the accord can be amended should both sides agree after negotiations, President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) made it clear that the legislature could only approve

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or reject the ECFA, not amend it, Hsu said.

Lai I-chung (賴宜中), an executive board member at the think tank, said that while the China-ASEAN free-trade agreement was signed by the Chinese premier and heads of ASEAN countries, the ECFA was inked by the Straits Exchange Foundation and the Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Strait, two semi-official organizations.

Source: [Taipei Times - 2010/07/14](#)