

US concerned over ECFA notification

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The US government has expressed serious concern over the fact that the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (ECFA) documents signed by Taiwan and China in June have yet to be submitted to the WTO as promised, Taiwan's envoy to Washington said yesterday.

"Sending a notification about the ECFA to the WTO is the right thing to do," Taiwan's Representative to the US Jason Yuan (袁國君) told Democratic Progressive Party Legislator Huang Wei-cher (黃偉哲) at the legislature's Foreign and National Defense Committee.

Huang had asked Yuan how he had explained to the US government that Taiwan had yet to notify the WTO of the ECFA, as promised by President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九).

Ma made the promise during a July 1 press conference at the Presidential Office.

Yuan said he had conveyed US concerns to Taipei, adding that he did not know what had delayed the process of notification.

"The ECFA has to be consistent with the spirit enshrined in the WTO" and in line with the meaning attached to the accord, in that it must allow for the greater internationalization of Taiwan, Yuan said.

A Ministry of Economic Affairs official said in August that the ministry would handle the translation into English of the ECFA documents to be submitted to the WTO. Taipei would then notify Beijing of its English version to ensure there are no discrepancies between the translations before each side submitted its English version to the WTO, the official said.

On Nov. 30, American Institute in Taiwan Chairman Raymond Burghardt urged Taiwan to deliver on its promise in a speech in Taipei.

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“Now that the agreement is in force, we encourage the parties [Taiwan and China] to notify the WTO of the ECFA in a manner consistent with the requirements for agreements that cover substantially all trade. We will be closely observing the ECFA process as it moves forward,” Burghardt said.

Honigmann Hong (洪鴻兵), an adjunct assistant professor of economics at National Tsing Hua University’s Center for Contemporary China, said the WTO Secretariat must be notified of the ECFA before Jan. 1, the date on which the “early harvest” program on tariff cuts contained in the deal comes into force.

WTO regulations require that members entering regional or bilateral trade agreements fulfill the “obligation of transparency” before commencement of the deals, Hong said.

To ensure compliance with WTO standards, once the WTO is notified of such agreements, signatories are required to take questions on the agreement from other WTO members, while the WTO Secretariat will present a detailed analysis of the agreement or factual presentation within a year, he said.

If the WTO were not notified of the ECFA, it would give substance to the fears held by some that trade between Taiwan and China is regarded as an “internal Chinese affair,” Hong said.

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