

Referendum proposal likely to be rejected: TSU head

Written by Taipei Times

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Taiwan Solidarity Union (TSU) Chairman Huang Kun-huei (黃昆輝) yesterday said the chances that a review committee that has already rejected proposals for a referendum on a controversial trade pact with China would treat a fourth and final bid on the matter any differently were very slim.

Speaking outside a hearing held to determine the legality of his latest proposal to turn the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (ECFA) over to a public vote, Huang said the committee would likely turn it down when it reviews it tomorrow, despite the fact that referendums are a “basic right.”

“I think our proposal is about to be struck down,” Huang told reporters after announcing he would boycott the hearing. “The reason we continue to bring about these referendum bids is because we believe it to be a basic right of Taiwanese.”

During the current hearings — the third held in the past eight months — senior officials at the Ministry of Finance and the Mainland Affairs Council voiced their opposition to a referendum, saying it was unnecessary as opinion polls showed the trade pact, which lowers tariffs on hundreds of goods across the Taiwan Strait, was well received by the public. The ECFA came into force in September, while the “early harvest” list of items receiving preferential tariff treatment took effect on Saturday.

Signed in June, the ECFA was initially opposed by both the TSU and the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), although the DPP later softened its position. Critics claim the agreement will cost Taiwanese jobs and erode the nation’s sovereignty as a result of increasing dependency on China.

Vice Minister of Economic Affairs Francis Liang (梁國新) told the hearing that rather than isolate Taiwan, the ECFA had boosted its global competitiveness, while Mainland Affairs Council Deputy Minister Chao Chien-min (趙建民) said the agreement was “well-monitored” by the legislature.

“The government doesn’t support a referendum over the ECFA ... it’s unnecessary,” Chao said.

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The referendum review -committee previously rejected all three prior proposals — two by the TSU and another by the DPP — saying there were contradictions within the question and wording of the proposal. The TSU question would ask voters whether they agreed that the government should have signed the ECFA with China.

Organizers have called the committee's actions "undemocratic" and the TSU has issued a court challenge over the second decision made in June. Each of the proposals had included about 100,000 signed petition forms, more than the number required by law, which organizers said reflected popular opinion.

Huang said that if the proposal were rejected tomorrow, his party would be unlikely to file any more referendum proposals and instead seek to overturn earlier decisions through administrative appeals.

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