

Committee rejects request for referendum on ECFA

Written by Taipei Times
Friday, 28 August 2009 07:41 -

The Executive Yuan's Referendum Review Committee yesterday turned down a petition submitted by the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) asking for a referendum on the economic cooperation framework agreement (ECFA) that the government plans to sign with China.

The committee turned down the petition at the end of a three-and-half-hour meeting after 13 members voted against the petition, while four voted in favor and two abstained.

"The majority of committee members felt that the question in the referendum petition was not clear enough," committee chairman Chao Yung-mau (趙榮茂) told a news conference after the meeting. "It does not ask the public to express its opinion on a proposal of a legislative principle, a major policy decision, or concrete issues of a major policy."

"Instead, it asks the public to vote on something that has not yet happened — since the ECFA is not a concrete policy yet. Hence, we decided that the petition did not meet the criteria for a referendum as stipulated in the Referendum Act (公投法)," he said.

The petition by the DPP asks the question: "Do you agree that the government should put the ECFA that Taiwan signs with China to a referendum?"

"Holding a referendum on whether a referendum should be held is not a question that can be asked in a referendum as stipulated in the Referendum Act," Chao said.

He added that the DPP could appeal the decision or petition for another referendum when the content of the ECFA becomes clearer.

National Taiwan University law professor Chen Miao-fen (陳妙芬), who voted in favor of the petition, said that she did not endorse the committee's conclusion.

"We didn't have a thorough discussion before the chairman called a vote on it," Chen said, adding that while the meeting started at 2pm, they did not start discussing details of the proposal until around 3:30pm and that Chao rushed to close the discussion and call a vote at 5:30pm.

"We voted on whether to close the discussion, and the result was 9 to 9, meaning that half of the people still thought that we needed more time," she said. "But the chairman ruled to end the discussion — I thought it was quite abrupt."

The DPP yesterday called the committee's decision biased and lacking in objectivity. It said the committee had completely overlooked the people's right to propose a referendum.

The party added that an ECFA not only pertains to the economic relations between China and

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Taiwan, but also Taiwan's sovereignty.

It said that the committee's reasons for vetoing its proposal were preposterous because it would be unreasonable to launch a referendum after the pact had been signed and the damage had been done.

The DPP is expected to file an appeal.

Meanwhile, about 50 Referendum Alliance for Taiwan members staged a protest outside the venue of the meeting, saying the meeting was illegitimate.

"The committee has no right to make the decision, because expressing our opinion through a referendum is our right as citizens of a democracy," convener Tsay Ting-kuei (蔡丁貴) said.

When asked for comment, Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) Legislator Lo Shu-lei (羅淑蕾) said she supported the committee's decision.

Lo said holding a referendum on ECFA before the public fully understands the pros and cons of the issue would only mislead the people.

ADDITIONAL REPORTING BY JENNY W. HSU AND FLORA WANG

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Source: [Taipei Times 2009/08/28](#)