An open letter to Wang Jin-pyng

Sunday, May 23, 2010, Page 8

Dear Mr Speaker, Wang Jin-pyng (王金平),

As strong supporters of a free and democratic Taiwan, we would like to call your attention to a number of concerns we have regarding the ongoing negotiations between the Taiwanese and Chinese governments to arrive at an economic cooperation framework agreement.

While in principle, an economic agreement between the two countries would be laudable, it concerns us that there has been a lack of transparency and legislative checks and balances on the part of the government in Taiwan: Media and civic groups have complained about the secrecy of the negotiations and the fact that there is no clarity on what the agreement would entail or what impact it would have on Taiwan’s economy, in particular its agriculture sector, small and medium-size industries and the labor force.

Furthermore, the Legislative Yuan appears to be sidelined in the decisionmaking process, which does not bode well for the country’s young democracy. Against this background, we urge you to emphasize that you attach great importance to checks and balances in a democratic system. It is also imperative that the Taiwanese government seeks a democratic consensus on this important decision through a public referendum of all people in Taiwan before the agreement is signed.

Many in Taiwan and abroad are also concerned about the impact of closer economic ties on Taiwan’s de facto independence and sovereignty: They feel that closer economic ties will give the government in Beijing leverage to push Taiwan into further political isolation. This would make it increasingly difficult for the people of Taiwan to maintain their freedom, basic human rights and democracy, as well as to determine their own future. The problem is, of course, that China unjustifiably claims sovereignty over Taiwan and doesn’t recognize its right to exist as a free, democratic and independent nation.

If Taiwan increasingly moves into the sphere of influence of a still very undemocratic China, this will have a negative impact on democracy and human rights in Taiwan itself and on its role as a beacon for democracy in East Asia. We feel that the present approach by the Ma administration is too much predicated on China having a say in how Taiwan relates to the rest of the world.

In our view, Taiwan should be accepted in its own right and be able to sign free trade agreements with other nations without going through China.

We may also refer to recent statements by two of Taiwan’s strongest supporters in the US Congress, who are very critical of the proposed agreement: In a briefing on April 28, Congressman Robert Andrews referred to it as a “cage” for Taiwan from which it will be difficult to escape, while Congresswoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen referred to it as a “Trojan Horse,” one gift-horse Taiwan should not allow in because Beijing is using it as a political tool with the ultimate goal of absorbing Taiwan.
Mr Speaker, we hope you will agree with us that maintaining a free and democratic Taiwan is essential, not only for the people of Taiwan, but also for the cause of freedom and democracy in East Asia as a whole. We thus urge you to take a critical look at the proposed trade agreement and ensure that the economic, political and strategic interests of the Taiwanese people are fully safeguarded.

Looking forward to hearing from you,

Sincerely yours,

Nat Bellocchi
Former chairman, American Institute in Taiwan
Coen Blaauw
Formosan Association for Public Affairs, Washington
Gordon G. Chang
Author, The Coming Collapse of China
Peter Chow
Professor of economics,
City College of New York
Stephane Corcuff
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