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Discussion Paper

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Outlook on the Future Cross-Strait Relations

(Summary)

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Cross-Strait issues have constituted an important theme in every “Presidential campaign” since 1996. Compared with the past four elections, the 2012 election is the first that was held under the context of rapid development of cross-Strait relations. The re-election of Ma Ying-jeou indicates that the Mainland’s Taiwan policy, the KMT’s Mainland policy and the “1992 Consensus” have won wide acknowledgement of the Taiwan public, which may serve as a benchmark for the future development of cross-Strait relations.

I. The “Taiwan-independence mentality” is the product of a particular period during the course of development of cross-Strait relations.

Despite the high-level Chinese identity of the Taiwan public in 1945, nearly six decades of severance between both sides across the Taiwan Strait brought about a social environment for the emergence of the “Taiwan-independence mentality.” The abnormal cross-Strait relationship during the six decades was seen on four aspects: 1) geographical separation; 2) relative economic independence that led to different approaches to economic development; 3) growing social gap partly due to Taiwan’s social transformation; and 4) increasing hostility and confrontation between both sides. Only on these conditions did the DPP and its “Taiwan-independence mentality” begin to develop in the late 1980s, thus they are only products of a particular period in the development of cross-Strait relations. Now that a new page has been opened and that increasing exchanges and cooperation have been going on between both sides across the Strait, the social environment for the “Taiwan-independence mentality” is totally different from before. “Taiwan-independence” will not be possible as long as the cross-Strait relationship does not retrogress to severance and confrontation of the past.

II. Inevitable Connection between Taiwan and the Mainland:

Geographically, the “three direct links” have dramatically shortened the time for travel across the Strait; culturally, more and more people on both sides—with shared history, culture and blood—have recognized their identity as the Chinese nation, which serves as the psychological foundation for the building of a “community with shared destiny”; economically, ECFA and the follow-up agreements provide a solid material foundation for closer exchange and cooperation across the Strait while expanding their common interests. In all, both sides will be more closely connected to each other with the further peaceful development of cross-Strait relations.

III. Both sides should endeavor to explore ways of connection between them.

The crux of cross-Strait relations is the settlement of their political relationship, which entails not only the determination and leadership of political elites on both sides, but more importantly, the support of the general public through more engagement and exchanges with each other. Over the past four years, people-to-people exchanges across the Strait have prospered, yet it will take a much longer time for both sides to truly come to the stage of full-scale, whole-hearted communication. Therefore, both sides should keep encouraging such exchanges on the basis of maintaining peace and development of their relationship, so as to create an increasingly favorable environment for the settlement of political issues between them.

IV. A major goal of the Mainland's current Taiwan policy is to foster better conditions for handling the difficult issues between both sides across the Strait.

With the re-election of Ma Ying-jeou, the future four years provide yet another historic opportunity for cross-Strait relations. The first step is to consolidate and expand the social foundation of cross-Strait relations mainly by three approaches: 1) pushing forward the follow-up consultations of ECFA and deepening the economic cooperation of both sides; 2) promoting cultural and educational exchanges between both societies to enhance their mutual understanding and common identity; 3) conducting political dialogue by incremental means but unconditionally. For example, such dialogue may begin with political issues related to economic exchanges. Or, political consultation can be first staged on academic and other non-governmental platforms. In conclusion, with the end of severance and the growing exchanges and cooperation between both sides across the Taiwan Strait, they are bound to come together eventually in a way acceptable to all.