

**Track Two Dialogue on
EU-China-Relations and the Taiwan Question
Shanghai, 5-6 June 2010**

A workshop jointly organised by German Institute for International and Security Affairs / Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP), Berlin and Shanghai Institutes for International Studies (SIIS), Shanghai, with the friendly support of the Robert Bosch Foundation, Stuttgart.

Discussion Paper

Do not cite or quote without author's permission

**Struggling to Regain Popular Support: The Ma Administration at
Half-Time**

Dr. Hermann Halbeisen
Research Institute for Political Science and European Affairs

SWP

Ludwigkirchplatz 3-4
10719 Berlin
Phone +49 30 880 07-0
Fax +49 30 880 07-100
www.swp-berlin.org

Introduction

Two years ago, in 2008, the Blue Camp reaped landslide victories in both the legislative and presidential elections. Since then, President Ma Ying-jeou and his administration have experienced a massive loss of support among Taiwan's population, inducing foreign observers to speculate about the causes for 'Ma's puzzling midterm malaise' and about his chances for re-election in 2012¹. The Kuomintang (KMT) also suffered setbacks, performing poorly in a number of elections and by-elections. Both president and party are thus confronted with a range of challenges that will test their political acumen in the remaining years running up to the presidential elections in 2012.

This paper will look at the following aspects of the present administration on Taiwan:

- the administration's domestic performance vis-a-vis popular expectations
- Ma's chairmanship of the KMT
- the administration's – and the KMT's – performance in the elections
- ECFA and related matters in the domestic debate, and
- the prospects for the elections in 2012.

1) President Ma and his Administration

After the turbulent times of the second Chen Shui-bien administration, characterized by a president and an administration engulfed by accusations of corruption and abuse of office while trying to offset its weakness through confrontational policies both at home and abroad, the new Ma administration was received with high expectations. In his election campaign, President Ma had promised a quick return to high economic growth rates and a less politicized administration, encapsulated in the slogan 'Ma shang hao'.²

Soon after the installation of the new administration, however, first words of warning were raised doubting that the president's selection of personnel for the new administration was adequate to the task awaiting them and suggesting the need for a reshuffle of the new cabinet. This issue was raised by Shen Fu-hsiung, a former Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) member of the Legislative Yuan (LY). According to him the incumbent officials all possessed superb professional

1 Rigger, Shelley; Ma's Puzzling Midterm Malaise. Washington, DC March 11, 2010 (Brookings Northeast Asia Commentary, 37)

2 Adams, Jonathan; Taiwan's president Ma faces high expectations at home and in China. In: Christian Science Monitor, 21.05.2008

competence but not the communication skills needed in a prominent political position. In Shen's words, they were incapable of being 'street smart' to communicate with the people in a down-to-earth daily-life language.³

The Domestic Political Scene

Two developments characterize the domestic political scene during the first two years of Ma Ying-yeou's term: a persistent pessimism of public opinion and the return of confrontational politics.

Various public opinion polls revealed a considerable uneasiness of public opinion concerning both the lay of the land and the perspectives of the island's development. Analysing the results of the latest edition of its 'State of the Nation Survey', conducted once a year on a regular basis, Common Wealth Magazine discovered that the people on Taiwan are pessimistic about the state of the economy and sceptical about the government's performance.⁴ Concerning future prospects, the results revealed that nearly half of the population had a pessimistic attitude. Overall, 46.6 percent of respondents were pessimistic concerning Taiwan's future prospects, while only 39.8 percent were optimistic.⁵

Despite its resounding defeat and the continuing embarrassment of judicial proceedings against its former chairman Chen Shui-bian, members of his family and their accomplices the DPP quickly overcame a period of internal disorientation and regained its ability to manoeuvre. Using the lawsuits as an instrument to mobilize its core supporters the party was able to profit from the communication gaffes and the wavering of the new administration as well as the general uncertainty about the course of the Ma administration to regain its influence on public opinion. The anxieties of a considerable part of the public related to the administration's policies vis-a-vis China were deftly exploited. As a consequence domestic politics quickly regained their confrontational character. In the words of the editorialist of the conservative 'China Post': 'Taiwan's bitter partisan fights did not stop with the KMT's return to power, it has gotten worse. Taiwan's politics has become highly irrational and confrontational, to the detriment of national interests.'⁶

3 CP news staff; Ma dismisses calls over revamping cabinet. In: China Post International Edition (CPIE), 13.07.2008

4 Lee, Sherry; Taiwan Searches for a Clear Policy Direction. In: Commonwealth Magazine :413 (2009), english.cw.com.tw/print.do?action=print&id=10742

5 Ibid.

6 CP news staff; Good riddance 2009, and here's our wish list for 2010. In: CPIE, 05.01.10

Unmet Expectations of Presidential Leadership

Since its coming into effect in 1947 there has been controversy whether the constitution of the ROC specifies a presidential or semi-presidential system. These debates continued after the constitutional reforms that took place in the 1990s. The two presidents directly elected on Taiwan, Lee Teng-hui and Chen Shui-bian have both interpreted the political system as being presidential in nature and took the president of the United States as a role model.

Addressing this extended period of 'presidential politics' and the problems this approach created at the institutional level, Ma Ying-jeou declared that a return to the spirit of the constitution and its division of competences among the institutions of the central government would characterize his future administration.⁷ Accordingly, Ma has delegated the authority for economic and domestic affairs to the cabinet. His decision to strictly follow constitutional guidelines, however, has not led to a concomitant change in the public's perception of the role that the president should perform in Taiwan's political system, however.⁸ According to popular understanding the president should formulate concepts for the country's future course and communicate his policies to the public, but also engage in the micromanagement of the administration. Compared with the public's expectations concerning leadership by the president, its expectations concerning the political roles played by the cabinet and the political parties are considerably smaller.⁹

In the first two years of his presidency, however, President Ma has not displayed strong leadership, partly in accordance with his understanding of the constitutional role of the office, partly due to his personal political style. According to the judgement of Taiwan's population as well as that of many observers, the present administration has failed to make improvements in basically every policy field with the exception of relations between Taiwan and China – and this field is highly controversial domestically. In the perception of a large part of the public, President Ma has exposed himself as a leader without leadership, whose inconsistent policies have alienated his KMT supporters as well as the great majority of swing voters.

Since the second half of 2009, however, there are indications that Ma Ying-jeou is trying to address public expectation for leadership more directly. Justifying his candidacy for the chairmanship of the KMT, a move that was in variance with his former declarations, Ma pointed to public expectations and the need for better coordination among the administration, the Legislative Yuan and the KMT.

7 Obviously, Ma interprets the political system as semi-presidential and the distribution of competences between president and government in the Finnish or French way, with the president being responsible for foreign affairs and security.

8 Lee, Sherry; Taiwan Searches for a Clear Policy Direction. In: *CommonWealth Magazine* :413 (2009)

9 *Ibid.*, p.3

Government Performance

These doubts about the president's leadership ability are matched by the public's considerable scepticism concerning the performance of the Executive Yuan (EY), the government. These misgivings were partly a consequence of the EY's poor performance during and after typhoon Morakot, when the administration's slow response, lack of adequate information concerning the situation in the areas affected by the storm and a series of 'unbelievably incompetent decisions' – refusing foreign aid, for example – triggered a flood of public anger and denunciations that were to topple the cabinet of Premier Liu and severely damaged the president's standing.¹⁰

Dissatisfaction with the cabinet's look and feel had made itself felt already in 2008, as indicated by the statement of Shen Fu-hsiung mentioned above. From the time of the cabinet's assumption of office, people were generally unhappy with the performance of Premier Liu and his cabinet members, even KMT supporters backed his performance by only a lacklustre margin.

One major source of dissatisfaction was fed by the EY's communications that turned out to be inept to impart the government's policies and decisions in a persuasive manner to the population. This deficiency was reflected in the abysmal results the EY received in opinion polls: in one survey, a majority of respondents expressed their lack of understanding about the direction in which the government was taking the country. Only 5.2 percent said, they were very clear about the government's course.¹¹

Neither did the cabinet under the leadership of Prime Minister Liu succeed in instilling a feeling of competence among the population. Its negative survey ratings even surpassed those on communications: fully 67 percent of the respondents to the survey complained about the lack of administrative ability of officials, an increase of 3 percent over last year. 57 percent questioned the administrative competence of the government, an increase of 4 percent. This was the highest percentage revealed in similar surveys in the last 15 years.¹²

Given these negative public perceptions it comes as no surprise that the government's efforts in implementing some of the central tasks that Ma Ying-jeou had formulated for his administration, cleansing the government and reforming the judicial system to mention just two, were not perceived as being successful. Some 41.2 percent of respondents felt that justice in Taiwan has taken a step backwards since the Ma administration took power, compared to 28.3 percent who believed it had improved.¹³

10 CP news staff; Reshuffling the cabinet is not enough. In: CPIE, 23.08.2009

11 Ibid., p.2

12 CP news staff; Grim warning to the Ma administration. In: CPIE, 04.01.2009

13 Ibid., p.5. These results may be interpreted as a general indication of how the public of Taiwan appraises the island's judicial system. But they also reflect the close correlation of trust/distrust in the political institutions to the political orientations of the respondents.

But the performance of the government in dealing with corruption was also perceived as mixed at best. Respondents were split over whether the new administration was effective in its efforts to mitigate corruption in government, with 38.3 percent saying the situation has improved, and 36.1 percent saying it has not. These findings do not reflect well on President Ma, who made clean governance one of his main campaign planks.¹⁴

Trying to Turn the Tide

In the meantime, President Ma and his administration have increased their efforts to turn the tide of public opinion in their favour. Some of the EY's leading technocrats, considered to be responsible for the negative impression on public opinion, had to leave the EY in the reshuffle that followed the disaster of typhoon Morakot. Technocrats were replaced by politicians like Premier Wu Dun-yi and Vice-Premier Chu Li-lun – all equipped with a thorough experience in electoral politics.

In a parallel move the president undertook systematic efforts to strengthen his position in the administrative structure by establishing new instruments for coordination and assuming the chairmanship of the KMT. Various layers of networks were established designed to improve communication among the relevant institutional actors, the presidential office, the LY, the KMT's parliamentary party and the KMT party apparatus in order to foster consensus on and ease the implementation of policies. Participants in these networks include the premier, vice-premier and secretary-general of the EY as well as the KMT secretary-general and other senior party officials as well as legislators. The latest addition to this profusion of networks has the form of a regular meeting of president, vice-president, premier, LY speaker, and top party leaders that is to be held every Monday.

With the establishment of this new network there are now four communication platforms in operation between the branches of government and the KMT, including a regular gathering of the three chiefs of staff of the presidential office, the cabinet, and the ruling party.¹⁵

14 Ibid. p.6

15 CP news staff; Ma enhances communications in gov't and KMT. In: CPIE, 18.01.10

2) The Chairman's Problems: How to Reform the KMT without Endangering its Electoral Effectiveness

A second area where Ma Ying-jeou's rule is encountering challenges comprises the reform of the KMT. Having been elected to the chairmanship of the KMT in 2005, Ma relinquished this position due to accusations of misuse of funds while being mayor of Taipei city. Since 2007, the chairmanship has been held by Wu Po-hsiung.

Change in Approach

After his election to the presidency, Ma first pursued a policy of keeping his administration at a distance from the party and trying to disentangle party and government. This approach did not function too well, however, since the public continued to view president, party and the party's parliamentary caucus as one entity, while the KMT legislators resented the president's distanced attitude.

When chairman Wu's term drew to an end Ma Ying-jeou decided to take over the party chairmanship. On June 10, 2009 it was formally announced that he would run for the chairmanship of the ruling party in the election by KMT members to be held on July 26. While Ma – the only candidate – won the elections without problems, the turnout for the election stood at a low 57.79 percent, demonstrating once again the problems Ma the president is encountering in mobilizing voters. In this case, the low turnout was attributed to a widespread abstention by the party's largest voting bloc, the Huang Fu-hsing Council, whose members, servicemen on active duty or retired, were dissatisfied with the president's policy towards the mainland.¹⁶

Ma's move to double as chairman of the KMT was lauded by observers who expressed the expectation that he can consolidate his power as the supreme leader of both the nation and his party.¹⁷

The new chairman reiterated his determination to reform the ruling party and get the administration to work more closely with the legislative branch. Whether Ma will be successful in his reform efforts is dubious, however, given the lack of achievements during his first term as chairman. 'Ma promised party reform when he became KMT chairman while he was mayor of Taipei, he did next to nothing to reform the party. Whether he can deliver this time is open to doubt'.¹⁸

Three problem areas can be identified, where reforms of the party's practices seem to be most pressing: corruption, coordination and nomination.

16 CP news staff; President Ma elected KMT chairman. In: CPIE, 27.07.2009

17 CP new staff; It's time for Wu Po-hsiung to exit gracefully. In: CPIE, 15.06.2009, 1

18 China Post news staff; Significance of President Ma doubling as KMT chairman. In: CPIE, 28.07.2009

Corruption

Given his own image of incorruptibility, the elimination of corruption within the party lies at the centre of Ma's reform efforts. His determination is best demonstrated by Ma's assertion, that he doesn't mind the KMT losing nationwide elections so long as it fields candidates who are men and women of probity.¹⁹

Due to Ma's insistence the party has relegated a number of representatives that did not comply with party regulations or have become the object of judicial inquiries. The new chairman even went so far as to force several members of the party's most important decision-making body, the Central Standing Committee (CSC), to retire immediately after being elected. A complete re-election of the CSC was scheduled, after it was discovered that the stringent intra-party rules against vote-buying had been broken.

This decision was presented by the then KMT-Secretary General Tang Chun-bo as a first step towards party reform, demonstrating the importance of strengthening election discipline and carrying out clean elections of CSC members. The central party apparatus became actively engaged in the search for new candidates, trying to motivate members of Central Committee with good social reputation to participate in the new by-election.²⁰

Though the efforts of the party leadership to enforce a new election of the members of the CSC were successful, it failed to convince the public that the party has achieved its aim of banishing corruption from its ranks. According to the results of a survey carried out by CommonWealth Magazine, 'sixty percent of respondents felt that chairman Ma's anti-corruption reforms within the party were ineffective, in contrast to fewer than one-fifth (18 percent) who felt his measures were effective. Not only did most DPP supporters (81 percent) see his reforms as ineffective, but even 44 percent of KMT supporters felt that way'.²¹

Neither was chairman Ma successful in his efforts to promote his favoured CSC candidates from among members of the government. In the CSC elections held on November 14, 2009, twenty of the original 32 members were re-elected. There were 10 new faces, but none except one of them was cabinet minister who are technocrats rather than politicians and whom Ma had hoped would be elected to the new CSC. Only two ministers ran for re-election. One of them, Chen Wu-hsiung, chairman of the Council of Agriculture, won a seat. The other, Wang Yi-ting, chairwoman of the National Youth Election, failed.

Up till now, the new approach has also failed to convince the public that chairman Ma is carrying out his promised party reform in earnest.²² This may be

19 China Post news staff; Does Yeh Chin-chuan have to run for magistrate? In: CPIE, 06.08.2009,

20 CP news staff; KMT unveils rules against vote-buying; In: CPIE, 28.10.2009

21 Lin 2009, 7

22 CP news staff; Is the Kuomintang reformed? CPIE, 19.11.2009

one the reasons behind his decision to appoint King Pu-tsung, former vice-mayor of Taipei during Ma's time as mayor and one of his most trusted lieutenants, as secretary-general of the KMT.

Coordination

Since the demise of the authoritarian system, policy coordination between the president, the government, the party and the party's parliamentary caucus has been a constant problem of Taiwan's political system. While Lee Teng-hui, the last president belonging to the KMT, could still rely on the remnants of the old party-government structure, the presidency of his DPP-successor Chen Shui-bian was constantly plagued by problems of coordination.²³

Ma Ying-jeou is experiencing similar difficulties, especially when it comes to arranging support from the party's legislative caucus for government policies and to making the government responsive to the demands of the legislators. Some observers even detected signs of a power struggle between the administration and the LY, who tried to ascertain its leading role in various policy areas. The frequency and intensity of conflicts between these two institutions seems to have been one of the reasons behind Ma's decision to double as chairman of the KMT.

In the case of the present administration and the ruling party, problems of policy coordination are not caused by a lack of appropriate institutions. The KMT's CSC used to perform this task during the presidency of Lee Teng-hui and could have been reactivated to play this role again. Efforts to strengthen the body's functionality have been made. In November 2008, the party constitution was amended to provide institutional membership for a number of cabinet members in the CSC – with the aim of facilitating coordination between government and party.

Despite these measures, the influence of the CSC vis-a-vis other institutions like the party caucus in the Legislative Yuan and the president, who are directly elected by the people, continues to wane. The efforts undertaken since 2008 to develop the CSC into a body coordinating party and government by electing or delegating senior cabinet officials to its meetings did not have the intended effects, however. The CSC seems to have been relegated to listening to working reports at its weekly meetings and few important decisions are taken in this body. Its main function today is to approve slates of candidates to run in various elections.²⁴

As mentioned above, the president has created new bodies for the task of easing cooperation and coordination among the administration, the party and the legislative caucus. All these new bodies have one point in common: they are elitist or technocratic and do not provide for an appropriate involvement of the legislative caucus into the administration's decision making process.

23 Wang, Yeh-Lih; Ma facing difficult legislative balancing act. In: Taipei Times, 14.07.2008, 8

24 CP news staff; KMT making bold reforms. In: CPIE, 26.10.2009

Candidates, Nominations + Voters

A third area of party reform relates to the institutionalization of uniform nomination procedures for the selection of party candidates for the various elections and the personal qualifications that have to be fulfilled by the candidates in order to be electable. These qualifications comprise a clean record and voter appeal. At present, the record of chairman Ma in realizing these goals is patchy at best.

Efforts by the central party apparatus to enforce the new party rules have met with resistance by local factions. Candidates not confirmed by the party centre did not withdraw. They left the party instead and participated in the elections as independent candidates. In several cases – both in the legislative by-elections and the first round of local '3-in-1' local elections – this led either to the division of the KMT's voter base and the electoral success of competing DPP candidates or – in the case of a candidate enjoying the continued support of the local faction – in electoral victory of the former KMT member. In addition, the conflict between the party centre and the local party chapters over the choice of appropriate candidates seems to have seriously weakened the local party machines that have been a major factor in the KMT's electoral successes in the past. 'Ma's elitism has all but totally alienated local political bosses. That is the real crisis that Ma's KMT is now facing. He is trying to destroy its election machine'.²⁵

In addition to the difficulty of finding an electable and a winnable slate of honest politicians – a task where the chairman failed markedly in the county magistrate election in Hualien – the party is confronted with growing problems of voter mobilization due to both a general change in voter attitudes and to the diminishing impact of Ma Ying-jeou as a campaigner. In the words of the China Post: 'The president Ma card in the past often worked magic for many candidates, who received blessings from the once-charismatic leader, but that Midas touch has gone, judging from the defeat of his favoured candidate in a ruling KMT primary in Hualien.'²⁶

3) Elections²⁷

In the wake of the extraordinary results that the blue camp achieved in the two elections of 2008, simply maintaining this level of success in the following elections would have been considered an outstanding achievement. As it turned out, the blue camp was unable to maintain its momentum in the '3-in-1' local elections or in the by-elections to the LY, but it did not perform as poorly as

25 China Post news staff; The Kuomintang's real crisis. In: CPIE, 01.10.2009

26 China Post news staff; 'Ma Ying-jeou' card no longer has capital. In: CPIE, 05.09.2009

27 Since Dafydd Fell provides a detailed analysis of the elections, this paragraph is restricted to a short survey of the election results.

reports in the media suggested. The '3-in-1' local elections were carried out in only 17 of Taiwan's 23 counties and cities, since Taipei County, Taichung City and County, Tainan City and County as well as Kaohsiung City and County will be reorganized into special municipalities in the course of 2010. Elections in the then 5 special municipalities will take place in November 2010.

Township Elections

In these elections on the basic government level, the KMT garnered 57.35 percent of the mandates in the rural townships of the 17 counties and cities included in December's '3-in-1' local government administrators and representatives elections. The KMT obtained 121 of the 211 seats contested in the elections. The opposition DPP won 32 mandates, or 16.11 percent. The remaining 56 seats went to independent candidates. In addition to the KMT and the DPP, eight other parties joined the township chief elections but failed to gain any seats. In terms of vote numbers the KMT won 48.82 percent, the DPP got 20.04 percent, independents obtained 30.87 percent.²⁸

County and City Elections

In the county magistrate and city mayor elections the KMT's control of county and city governments was reduced by 2 to 12 counties and cities. The opposition recaptured Yilan county, four years after it lost the county to the KMT following a 24-year long period of rule. The KMT also failed to defeat the independent candidate running in Hualien, who had broken away from the KMT after failing to win party endorsement. But the party retook Kinmen county as its candidate narrowly defeated two independent contestants. Analysts pointed out that the KMT did not sustain major setbacks because the party's performance still exceeded expectations of retaining 11 seats. The election results were mostly interpreted as being the result of voters' dissatisfaction with the Ma administration rather than expressing satisfaction with the DPP.²⁹

The DPP succeeded in holding the counties of Yunlin, Chiayi and Pingtung as well as retaking the county of Yilan. In terms of voting percentages, the DPP garnered 45.32 percent of the county magistrate and city mayor votes, an increase of nearly six percent compared to the results from four years ago. The KMT obtained 47.88 percent, a decrease of 3.08 percent.³⁰

The DPP did not come close to scoring big in the elections for 592 city and county council seats, where the KMT garnered 43.94 percent of votes and the DPP

28 CP news staff; KMT grabs 57 percent of township chief seats. In: CPIE, 06.12.2009

29 CP news staff; Results were unsatisfactory: Ma. In: CPIE, 06.12.2009

30 For a detailed analysis of the elections, see the special election issue of Hsin Hsin-wen/The Journalist 1187A (06.12.2009)

took only 24.42 percent. The voting for 211 small town mayors was even more lopsided in favour of the KMT, which was able to win 48.82 percent of the vote and 121 mayoralities, and the DPP winning 20.04 percent to take just 34 of them, the remainder going to independents.

In the case of the city and county council elections, analysts pointed to the KMT's new policy of refusing to nominate candidates with criminal convictions as the decisive factor influencing the results. Public disappointment with President Ma's performance had a smaller impact, however.³¹

LY By-Elections

While the results the KMT obtained in the local '3-in-1' elections were tolerable – after all, the KMT's excellent results in the 2005 elections were to a large extent the consequence of the poor performance of the Chen administration – it suffered severe setbacks in the two by-elections that took place in January and February 2010. Of the 7 seats contested, the KMT lost 6 to the DPP.

The additional mandates won by the opposition resulted only in a slight shift in the distribution of seats in the LY and did not endanger the dominant position of the KMT. The DPP now controls more than one-fourth of the total seats in the legislature and thus has gained some procedural rights such as the right to propose constitutional amendments and to launch a recall of the president. But the KMT still has 75 seats at its disposal and thus commands an absolute majority, while the number of seats for the DPP grows to 33.³²

Elections in the 5 Special Municipalities

Compared to the elections analysed above, the mayoral and city councillor elections for the 5 special municipalities – Taipei, Xinbei, Taichung, Tainan and Kaohsiung – due to take place on November 27, 2010, will exert a significant influence on the power balance on Taiwan in general as well as on the presidential elections in 2012.

The five municipalities will not only comprise nearly 60 percent of Taiwan's population, their size – Xinbei City for example will have a population of more than 3.8 million people – and their funding will provide their administrations with greater leeway vis-a-vis the central government. Both political parties are well aware of the strategic importance of this contest and have already taken up their preparations.

In both camps the line-up of candidates has taken shape. In the case of the KMT the list of candidates comprises

31 CP news staff; KMT 'mid-term defeat' analogy mistake. In: China Post, 08.12.2009

32 CP news staff; More setbacks for KMT in by-election defeats. In: CPIE, 28.02.2010

- Hau Lung-pin, the incumbent mayor, for Taipei,
- Eric Li-luan Chu, former magistrate of Taoyuan county and vice-premier, for Xinbei,
- Jason C. Hu, the incumbent mayor, for Taichung,
- Kuo Tien-tsai, a former legislator and vice-president of Diwan university, for Tainan and
- Huang Chao-shun, a legislator in the LY, for Kaohsiung.³³

In the case of the DPP the situation has been more complicated. Several politicians have used the primaries as a tactical manoeuvre to test their chances for a political comeback. The party leadership did not succeed completely in smoothing the tempers of unsuccessful participants in the primaries. Yang Chiu-hsing, the incumbent magistrate of Kaohsiung county, has left the party and will run as an independent candidate for the mayorship in the new Kaohsiung city. The line-up of DPP candidates comprises

- Su Tseng-chang, former magistrate, premier and vice-presidential candidate, for Taipei,
- Tsai Ing-wen, current chairperson of the DPP, in Xinbei,
- Su Jia-chyuan, former chairman of the the Council of Agriculture, EY, for Taichung,
- William Lai Ching-te, a legislator, for Tainan, and
- Chen Chü, incumbent mayor of Kaohsiung city, for Kaohsiung.³⁴

Voting Behaviour

One remarkable factor characterizing all elections since 2008 has been the considerable difficulties the KMT has encountered in mobilizing its supporters and voters. This holds true both for elections within the party as well as the general elections.

The interpretations concerning the causes of the widespread abstentions vary, however. One group of analysts, point to the dissatisfaction of supporters of the pan-blue camp with the policies of the Ma administration. A variant of this line of argument interprets voter abstinance as the consequence of a deliberate policy on the part of Ma Ying-jeou who is allegedly willing to ignore the expectations of

33 Taiwan Today, 12.5.2010 (<http://www.taiwantoday.tw/ct.asp?xitem=102729&CtNode=414>)

34 DPP Newsletter August 2010
(<http://www.scribd.com/doc/37018300/DPP-Newsletter-Aug2010>)

blue camp supporters in order to satisfy the expectations of swing voters. 'Ma believes he can get away with neglecting his Pan Blue core supporters because they are captive voters who have nowhere else to go'.³⁵

A second line of argument points to a general tendency of decreasing party loyalty among the electorate on Taiwan and the concomitant rise of independent voters which complicate the calculations of the campaign strategists in both parties.³⁶

Regardless of which line of argument is correct, Ma Ying-jeou and the KMT will have to find appropriate measures to mobilize the pan-blue supporters in the coming elections. Judging by the latest reshuffle of personnel in the KMT's Dept. of Organization, the party leadership seems to be well aware of the challenge and has begun to strengthen organizational capabilities.³⁷

4) Contentious Relations with China

The China policy of the Ma administration continued to be the dominant topic of Taiwan's domestic political debate, the probable advantages and disadvantages of the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (ECFA) for the different regions of Taiwan and the different strata of its population being debated in a highly controversial manner between KMT and DPP as well as various groups of their supporters, but also among other segments of Taiwan's society.

Popular Attitudes

The political agitation over ECFA – and over Taiwan's relations with China in general – obscured the fact that the attitudes among Taiwan's population towards these issues were less churning than those of the political activists. Quite to the contrary, they turned out to be fairly differentiated.

According to the results of the 'State of the Nation Survey', a majority of the population displays a positive attitude towards a trade deal with China. But a considerable share of the population still does not 'fully understand' the issues involved, an attitude that has not changed significantly since 2009. 'Some 66.5 percent of respondents said they 'did not understand' or 'did not understand at all' the proposed ECFA, while only 30.2 percent said they 'understood' or 'fully understood' it, but of the those who said they understood the ECFA, the majority (52,7 percent to 33.3 percent) felt the trade pact would be beneficial to Taiwan'.³⁸

35 CP news staff; Illusion of swing votes. In: CPIE, 02.04.2009

36 This analysis is supported by the results of the 'Party Affiliation Tracking Analysis in Taiwan' undertaken on a monthly basis by the Global Views Survey Research Center.

37 Huan-hsien lien-san Kuo-min-tang jen-shih ta-ti-chen. In: Tzu-you shih-pao, 23.4.2010

38 Lin 2009, 3

The attitude toward the trade pact is strongly influenced by party affiliation, but also by the respondent's place of residence. Among the supporters of the KMT, a huge majority (84.9 percent) felt an ECFA would benefit Taiwan, compared to only 17.9 percent of DPP members. Significant differences in attitudes toward ECFA exist in different parts of the island, however. 'Respondents from central Taiwan had the least confidence in an ECFA, with only 45.1 percent saying they believed it would benefit Taiwan, compared to higher support in northern Taiwan (55.9 percent), southern Taiwan (52.3 percent) and eastern Taiwan and the country's outlying islands (65.8 percent)'.³⁹

Strong misgivings concerning the growing economic interdependence between the economies of Taiwan and China persist in all sections of Taiwan's society, though. The percentage of people who are 'worried' or 'extremely worried' about an increasing economic dependence of Taiwan has grown from 51.9 percent in 2004 to 60.95 percent this year. There is a regional element in the distribution of this attitude over the island, too: the further south the respondents live, the greater the concern.⁴⁰

Doubts and misgivings related to the economic aspects of the relationship between China and Taiwan do not give rise to a generally negative attitude towards negotiations with China in general, however. On the contrary, taking into consideration the high level of scepticism concerning the appropriateness of the Ma administration's policy vis-a-vis China and the signing of an ECFA, it comes as a surprise that a majority of people is in favour of entering into political negotiations with China, even during president Ma's current term. These negotiations should lead the two sides toward peace, recognition of each others' existence, and mutual non-aggression. Even in the DPP's southern Taiwan stronghold, almost half on the respondents (49.3 percent) favoured cross-Taiwan Strait political negotiations.

Irrespective of this positive attitude towards negotiations, scepticism concerning the administration's conduct of the negotiations with China is distinct. According to popular perception such political consultations would have to respect the will of the country's citizens and the government's mandate for negotiations should be decided in advance. 'Probing further what form the political negotiations should take, the poll found that a strong majority (63.5 percent) believed a referendum should be held before talks begin'.⁴¹

Concerning the individual aspects of attitudes toward China, the survey's results demonstrated that people on Taiwan are gradually growing more open the idea of working in China or sending their children to school there. 'The proportion of respondents willing to work in China has risen marginally over the past few years,

39 Lin 2009, 3

40 Lin 2009, 5

41 Lin 2009, 3

from 36.4 percent in 2006 to 37.8 percent this year, as has the number of people willing to have their children educated in China. Particularly noteworthy is the growing willingness of parents in the 30-39 age bracket (37.2 percent) to send their children to study in China'.⁴²

Party Strife over ECFA

With the date of the negotiations over ECFA approaching – at the time of writing, the negotiations were scheduled to take place during the next meeting of the two delegations in Nanjing in June – Taiwan's two political camps were undertaking strenuous efforts in winning over public opinion to their respective side. The parts of the population each side targeted were somewhat different, however. The government's campaign was focused on people living in central and southern Taiwan in regional terms, low- and medium income households as well as small and medium-sized enterprises in social terms. The campaign's central message towards these groups aimed to dispel common fears: ECFA not only would not hurt their economic interests, quite to the contrary, it would advance them.⁴³

The DPP, on the other hand, aimed its efforts pre-eminently at younger people who fear for their employment opportunities after an ECFA was signed. According to the party's statements, ECFA would endanger the jobs of up to 5.9 million white-collar workers.

A second issue debated domestically was procedural in nature and dealt with the question of how to safeguard the public's influence on the contents of the negotiations. Before the negotiations over ECFA were opened, the agreements negotiated between China and Taiwan have predominantly been of a technical nature and thus fell within the purview of the government. In the case of ECFA, a formal review process in the LY will be necessary – and the Ma administration has been adamant that it will follow the appropriate parliamentary procedures.⁴⁴

The DPP's position on this procedural issue appears to be somewhat contradictory, since the party demanded the establishment of a special parliamentary group to oversee the negotiations that would include legislators from all political parties while at the same time calling for a public referendum on the negotiations. Since the majority of the legislators belonged to the KMT, the DPP argued, the LY was unable to exert control over the government. 'Responding to Ma's promise to place the ECFA under absolute scrutiny by the LY, DPP Chairwoman Tsai Ing-wen said it is inadequate by subjecting (sic!) the trade

42 Lin 2009, 5

43 Romberg, Alan D.; All Economics Is Political: ECFA Front and Center. In: China Leadership Monitor :32 (2010), 4

44 For a critical comment on the procedures comp. Cohen, Jerome A., and Yu-Jie Chen; ECFA and Taiwan's Political System. In: U.S.-Asia Law Institute, July 6, 2010 (<http://www.usialaw.org/?p=3814>)

pact to the supervision of lawmakers because the parliament is now controlled by the KMT. Tsai said the DPP will continue pushing for holding a national referendum on the ECFA issues'.⁴⁵

After much public wrangling, government and opposition finally agreed on a televised debate between President Ma and chairwoman Tsai concerning the advantages and disadvantages of an ECFA. The debate took place on April 25, 2010. According to most analysts, the president was successful in pleading his administration's approach to ECFA, both as far as popular understanding of ECFA's contents was concerned as well as in providing the more convincing arguments.⁴⁶

5) Perspectives for 2012

Soon after their access to power, President Ma and his administration were confronted with a rapid and widespread decrease in public support. A combination of three factors can be identified as its cause: the administration proved unable to fulfil its promise for rapid economic growth and to disconnect Taiwan's economic development from the negative trend of world economy. The effects of popular dissatisfaction with the administration's economic performance were amplified by a perceived lack of presidential leadership and by the incompetence of the administration in dealing with natural disasters.

Since the second half of 2009 the president has taken measures to re-mediate these deficiencies. Coordination and communication within the government have been strengthened and the president's efforts to improve communication with the population have shown some positive results. Measures undertaken to reform the KMT have also gained vigour since one of President Ma's most trusted aides, King Pu-tsung, has taken over the position of secretary-general of the party.

The electoral setbacks the KMT encountered in 2009 – while demonstrating some disquieting implications for the party's future strength in the form of its growing inability to mobilize voters – should in my opinion be interpreted as a correction of the excellent results of the elections of 2005 and 2008. The results of 2009 provide a more adequate reflection of the relative strength of the two main competitors, DPP and KMT.

As far as the DPP is concerned it regained its ability to mobilize public opinion and overcame the negative influence of Chen Shui-bian's legacy. But the party still

45 CP news staff; Government resolute on ECFA. In: CPIE, 08.12.2009

46 The assessment of the debate and the performance of the two contestants in Taiwan's media was quite controversial. While a majority of analysts as well as opinion surveys saw Ma Ying-jeou as the winner of the debate, some deep green media stated that Tsai Ing-wen was the better performer. For a detailed report covering various aspects of the debate see Hsin Hsin-wen/The Journalist :1208 (29.4.2010), 9-33

has not overcome a number of internal problems. Power relations within the party are still dominated by those personalities that came to prominence during the descent of CSB's rule. Tsai Ing-wen has gained in influence, but has not yet been able to reach a position equal to that of the four 'heavenly kings'. And the party has failed to formulate its own China policy, due to persistent differences of opinion among its activists.

Thus, President Ma's chances for re-election in 2012 will be influenced strongly by developments in three fields: the economy, the results of the elections in the 5 special municipalities and the the outcome of the ECFA negotiations with China. Should the ECFA negotiations lead to provisions that are generally favourable for Taiwan and the KMT win at least three of the mayor-ships in the special municipalities, his chances for re-election appear to be good.

The economy, at least, is already showing signs of recovery. In the last quarter of 2009 both exports and domestic consumption grew. And judging by the results of opinion polls taken on the occasion of Ma's first two years in office, he seems to have regained some of the public confidence he had lost earlier.⁴⁷

47 Cp. Lian-he-pao-hsi min-yi tiao-ch'a chung-hsin; Ma-tsung-tung liang-nian shih-cheng: Min-chung ta 58 fen. In: Lian-he-pao, 19.5.2010; Wang-wang Chung-Shih min-tiao chung-hsin; 43 p'a ken-ting: Ma liang-nian chih-tieh hui-shen. In: Hsin-wen su-pao, 20.05.2010