

Taiwan's recent Parliamentary Elections and their Implications on Cross-Strait Relations

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Speaker: **Dr. Liu Shih-Chung**, Senior Counsellor to the President of Taiwan

Chair: **Mr. Georges Legros**, Senior Advisor of EIAS

The European Institute for Asian Studies (EIAS) was honoured to welcome H.E. Prof. Dr. Kau Michael Ying-Mao, Ambassador of the Taipei Representative Office in the EU and Dr. Liu Shih-Chung, Senior Counsellor to the President of Taiwan. They were invited to the premises to take part in a discussion on Taiwan's recent parliamentary elections and the impact of this second democratic change of government on Taiwan's political future. Dr. Liu Shih-Chung also analysed the likely implications of these elections for Taiwan's future relations with the People's Republic of China across the Taiwan Strait.

The honorary guest speaker Dr Liu Shih-Chung studied politics and international relations at the universities of Soochow and Tamkang in Taipei, before obtaining his PhD at Columbia University in New York. He was Deputy Director in the DPP's Department of International Affairs and worked for the Taipei Times and the Taiwan News, before joining the Office of President Chen Shui-Bien as a Senior Counsellor. More recently, he was Vice-Chairman of the Research and Planning Committee of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The chairman of this luncheon briefing, Mr. Georges Legros, Senior Advisor of EIAS, first welcomed everyone and gave a short introduction to the meeting. He described Taiwan as the most democratic country in Asia. Next, Mr. Legros passed on the word to Dr. Liu Shih-Chung, who pictured an overview of the current Taiwanese situation, divided into three parts.

Dr. Shih-Chung started by giving a brief summary of the parliamentary elections, held on January 12th.

He also analysed the possible consequences of the presidential elections on March 22nd. He explained how 4 years ago Taiwan drew up a Constitution of Reform. This Constitution of Reform was triggered by public dissatisfaction. The reform was based upon two modifications: the number of seats in Taiwan's new parliament was reduced from 225 to 113; secondly, the electoral rules were changed in order to fight corruption and improve efficiency. This new voting system also made it possible that voters could cast ballots for both a party and a particular candidate in their constituency. Though the Kuomintang (KMT) and other political parties were opposed to these reforms, the system was changed nevertheless. In this way, Mr. Liu illustrated and emphasized the democratic structure of the Taiwanese society.

Taiwan's recent parliamentary elections, held in January, were the third since President Chen Shui-Bien's Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) ousted the Kuomintang (KMT) from power in 2000. It resulted in a sweeping victory for the KMT. The outcome of the presidential elections on March 22nd, may well be the same. The candidate of the KMT, Dr. Ying-Jou Ma, will be contesting against the new leader of the DDP, Frank Hsieh. The KMT easily and abundantly won the

parliamentary elections, bringing home 81 seats or 72 percent. The DDP secured only 27 seats or 24 percent. Other parties got hold of 5 seats.

Dr. Liu explained how the KMT is trying its best to change the party. It is keeping up a humble image during the presidential campaign in order to downplay the one-party image.

The second part of Dr. Liu's exposition was dedicated to the perception of Taiwan and the current situation by the international community. He explained that the world is looking with caution at Taiwan. The government organizes in March, coinciding with the presidential elections, a referendum about joining the United Nations. To make this referendum succeed, there are two conditions: at least 51 percent of eligible voters are required to bring out their votes. Secondly, the majority has to vote in favour of joining the UN.

Furthermore, there are significant differences in the policies of the two main parties as mainland China is concerned. The DPP advocates the independence of Taiwan, whereas the KMT favours a rapprochement with the People's Republic. So, the outcome of the presidential elections, particularly if they are won by the KMT, has important consequences for Taiwan's future relations with Beijing.

Finally, as the referendum to join the UN is concerned, the world is cautious, as mentioned before, to take sides. China is openly opposing the referendum, pressing other UN-countries to condemn the referendum as well.

Dr. Liu concluded his lecture by presenting some hypotheses of what might be the situation after the presidential elections on March 22nd. According to him, there are four possible scenarios: Mr. Ying-Jou Ma wins the elections and the outcome of the referendum to join the UN will be negative. This would complicate Taiwan's situation on the international scene. Or Mr. Ma becomes president and the referendum has an affirmative result. This situation would create room for political maneuvers for Taiwan. Thirdly, Mr. Chen Shui-Bien wins, making Taiwan more focused upon economy and the referendum is negative. Finally, Mr. Chen wins and the referendum is affirmative.

The future of the cross-road relations depends on which candidate wins the elections. The campaign of Mr. Ma is focused upon the opening of the red wings; he will not engage in a political dialogue. On the other hand, the campaign of Mr. Chen is centered around more political and economic openness. If Mr. Chen prevails, the number of tourists will increase. Furthermore, he often refers to the concept of 'cohabitation', which he has been promoting during his campaign. At the same time, Beijing continues to keep away Taiwan from international relations.

Dr. Liu concluded by saying that he cannot predict which scenario will become reality after March 22nd. But we are all looking forward to the outcome of the presidential elections and the referendum. They will have a major impact on the international relations.

After the interesting explanation of Dr. Liu, there was opportunity to ask questions.