



# A BLUE OR GREEN FUTURE FOR CROSS-STRAIT RELATIONS?

By Martina Klimesova

*On January 14, 2012, the Taiwanese people will cast their votes in both legislative and presidential elections, choosing between a continuation of President Ma's policy of rapprochement towards Beijing or a more "Beijing skeptic" approach as outlined by the opposition Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) candidate Tsai Ing-wen. Despite the DPP's attempt to stir the focus of the election debate away from the cross-strait relations to social issues and judiciary reform, this debate continues to dominate Taiwanese politics. What are the implications of the current campaign for cross-strait relations? What are the changes that can be expected after the elections?*

In recent weeks, exchanges between Beijing and Taipei have slowed as the election campaign picks up. Beijing does not wish to intervene in the elections and does not want to fuel speculations of possible pending agreements between the current administration in Taipei and the PRC leadership. The next president of Taiwan will be inaugurated on May 20, 2012, only a few months before the appointments of new national leaders at the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in Beijing. This offers only a short period for any significant shifts should there be a change of color in Taipei.

Ma Ying-jeou, the incumbent president of Taiwan, vying for his second term, has placed mainland China as the focal direction of Taiwanese politics. During his first term, a number of economic agreements were signed between Beijing and Taipei, including the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (ECFA), individual visitor visas were granted for mainland tourists, and Taiwan's universities have started accepting full-time students from the mainland. Ma's opponents are concerned that his policies are too lenient towards Beijing and that the economic benefits Taipei gains from improved relations are not sufficient compensation for the allegedly growing political dependency on China.

Tsai Ing-wen, Taiwan's first female presidential candidate, became chair of the DPP in May 2008 when the party was challenged by vast internal problems. These came after its defeat in the 2008 presidential elections and when several of its high-ranking members were facing criminal charges for corruption, including former president Chen Shui-bian. Tsai is a lawyer educated at a top-ranking Western university with prior executive experience and has very similar profile to President Ma. She is trying to reframe

the focus of the elections from the cross-strait debate, which is a traditionally dominant theme for the Pan-Blue team, to Taiwan's internal issues such as social issues and judiciary reform. Tsai also highlights the need to place more importance on relations with the U.S., Japan, Europe, and ASEAN countries as well as framing the cross-strait relations within a multilateral context. This is contradictory to President Ma's view. He argues that Taiwan should benefit from its special relations with China and its emerging economic superpower economy. In recent months, however, Tsai has indicated that, if elected, the ECFA with China would be sustained. Her critics point out that her policies are still unclear and that she does not offer any realistic alternatives.

James Soong Chu-yu of the People First Party (PFP), the former governor of "Taiwan province" (1994–1998) and a former Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) secretary-general, made a surprise announcement of his intentions to run in July. PFP belongs to the Pan-Blue coalition and Soong is thus expected to divert voters leaning traditionally towards the KMT from casting their votes for President Ma. Soong's supporters from the Pan-Blue team are dissatisfied with Ma's reforms of the KMT which includes mainly cutting elderly leaders and established networks from access to power, Ma's supporters however hope that Soong will use his candidacy as a bargaining chip to improve the position of PFP candidates in and after the legislative elections and that he will withdraw his candidacy shortly before the election date and support Ma Ying-jeou.

## ***Cross-strait relations at crossroad?***

Despite the DPP's efforts, the cross-strait issues continue to



dominate the political debate. President Ma wishes to continue with rapprochement, positive engagement, and focuses on mutual benefits of the cross-Strait relations. Tsai, on the other hand, advocates adopting a more cautious approach, exhorts against paying a political price for economic privileges, and denies China a special status in Taiwan's relations. The KMT team alerts that the DPP approach to the cross-Strait relations will result in significant setbacks. It has, for instance, been indicated that DPP's presidential victory would likely end the diplomatic truce between Beijing and Taipei. Six to seven countries currently holding diplomatic relations with Taipei have reportedly expressed their wish to switch allegiance to Beijing but were stopped by the PRC as a sign of a goodwill towards the current leadership in Taipei. In contrast, the DPP supporters claim that the KMT is purposefully portraying worst-case scenarios and speculations to deter voters from choosing the DPP candidate.

It should however be noted that cross-Strait relations remain a complex issue to which not even the KMT has an ultimate remedy. As evident from the currently stalemated negotiations on the mutual protection investment agreement, even more wide-ranging negotiations on economic issues have proved sensitive. Taipei has requested international arbitration in case of any possible disputes, but Beijing has rebuffed this as any disputes in its view would be a domestic issue.

## 1992 consensus vs. Taiwan consensus

The 1992 consensus between the KMT and the PRC endorses the "One China Principle," but both sides maintain their own definitions. Tsai has not accepted the 1992 consensus as the DPP views it as an agreement solely between Beijing and the KMT, but proposes a so-called "Taiwan consensus" instead, to be determined by the people of Taiwan generated through democratic process. However the specifics of the consensus, and their political implications, remain unclear.

It is understood among all political actors in Taiwan that a Hong Kong type of solution is unacceptable in the case of

Taiwan but beyond that there is no uniting view on Taiwan's future status. The DPP has voiced its concerns over what President Ma would do in his second term if re-elected, and argues that he would initiate negotiations with Beijing on political issues. Ma denies this, claiming that his agenda would not include reunification talks and that he continues to adhere to his "Three-No's Policies" (no to unification, no to independence, and no to use of force).

## Future outlook

Public opinion polls indicate that the race between the KMT and the DPP will be very tight. It seems likely that neither side will rush to a permanent solution of the cross-Strait issue. Very few believe that a DPP election victory would revert cross-Strait relations to the poor levels of Chen Shui-bian's presidency. It appears also unlikely that the deep-blue, pro-unification, camp would gain more prominent voice.

Most Taiwanese advocate a solution within a wider status quo. Taiwan will have to find a balance between economic opportunities stemming from its special relations with the mainland and maintaining a sufficient level of political and security autonomy. They also hope that Taiwan can share its experience with the PRC on democratic transition, abating social unrest, and managing urban issues like relocation and compensation for land acquisition. Whether this "soft power" approach will have any impact on development of the cross-Strait relations remains to be seen.

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