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Where to go from now? – Taiwan's Political Landscape and Sino-Taiwanese Relations after the December 2001 Legislative Elections*

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The re-election of Taiwan's Legislative Yuan on December 1st, 2001, had been awaited with much suspense both domestically and internationally. As all opinion surveys had indicated before, no political party was able to gain an absolute majority of votes. What kind of future government could be built, would depend on the relative gains and losses of the *Guomindang* (GMD) and the *Democratic Progressive Party* (DPP). Should the GMD keep its position as the largest party in the legislature, it would probably be able to form a majority alliance with the *People's First Party* (PFP) and the *New Party* (NP), thereby uniting the so-called "pan-blue" (or pro-China)-camp and getting enough legitimacy for claiming the right to nominate the premier. If the DPP won the relative majority of votes and found the support of the newly-established *Taiwan Solidarity Union* (and some like-minded independents), this would perhaps still not be enough to secure an absolute majority of the "pan-green" (or "Taiwan-first")-camp; however, the DPP would claim as strongly as the GMD to be in the position of forming the new government and nominating the premier – even against a "blue-camp"-majority. The possibility of a coalition government transcending blue and green camp borders was certainly discussed in pre-election Taiwan. However, besides some tentative speculations on a cooperation between the PFP and the DPP, this was no serious talk. Even a PFP-GMD coalition after the polls was a contentious issue for most observers – too big seemed the personal rifts between leading politicians in both parties, especially those between PFP strongman Song Chuyu and GMD party chief Lian Zhan. All in all, there was much pessimism on the expectation that Taiwanese politics was to become more reliable and more stable after the December polls. At best, domestic experts hoped that the elections' results would gradually lead to more pragmatic politics and a reduction of the ideological polarisation and legislative inefficiency that Taiwan has experienced since the takeover of a DPP minority government in May, 2000.

* This report contains some results of field research carried out by the author in September and October 2001 in Taiwan as part of a study on Taiwanese nation-building and national identity construction.

Table 1: The December 2001 Legislative Polls: Distribution of Votes and Seats

	DPP	GMD	PFP	TSU	NP	Others
Percentage of votes	37,8	32,6	21,0	8,8	2,6	8,7
Percentage of seats	38,7	30,2	20,4	5,8	0,5	4,5
Elected Seats	69	49	33	8	1	8
Seats allocated to Aboriginies	-----	4	2	-----	-----	2
Seats allocated to Overseas Chinese	3	2	2	1	-----	-----
Seats allocated to Political Parties	15	13	9	4		-----
Total Seats	87 (+17)	68 (-55)	46	13	1 (-10)	10 (-11)*

*Taiwan No.1 Party: 1 seat; independents: 9 seats.

(Source: www.taiwanheadlines.gio.tw, December 2nd, 2001)

Three months after the polls and the recent inauguration of a new DPP-led administration that has assumed office on February 1st, there is indeed more reason for hope than pessimism. Certainly enough, Taiwan still has a minority government. However, the humiliation of the GMD in the legislative polls will make it difficult for the former ruling party to obstruct DPP policies "on behalf of the people of Taiwan" in the very same way it has done since the takeover of the first Chen-administration in May, 2000. Also, the personal rivalry of GMD chairman Lian Zhan and PFP strongman Song Chuyu will render any cooperation between those two parties complicated at best.¹

The new government does not strive for a formal coalition with any party but prefers to unite them in what president Chen Shuibian has called a "cross-party alliance for national stabilization". This "umbrella strategy" might work for the time being, but it does not replace the long-term necessity to institutionalize parliamentary cooperation by formal coalition-building in order to secure legislative majorities. While the pragmatic crossing of ideological boundaries with respect to the one-China principle might still be difficult today, it is clearly Taiwan's future. Only then sound government can be achieved and political stalemates with their counterproductive effects on economic performance be avoided. Interesting enough, the debate on further constitutional reform and the introduction of a genuine presidential system has gained steam after the legislative elections.² Doubtlessly, this would further

¹ However, cooperation is not impossible, as the recent elections of speaker and vice-speaker of the Legislative Yuan have shown. PFP support secured the success of two KMT candidates. See "Anger greets KMT's clean sweep", in: *Taipei Times*, February 2nd, 2002 (Internetversion: www.taipeitimes.com).

² See "Parties tackle Legislative Reform", in: *Taipei Journal*, December 14th, 2001, p. 2; "Official sparks debate on constitutional reform", in: *Taipei Journal*, December 21st, 2001, p. 2; "Three-branch system of government would not nullify Republic of China", in: *Taipei Journal*, January 11th, 2002, p. 2.

strengthen Taiwan's democracy, as the president would finally become the formal head of government and the constitutional relationship between the legislative and executive branches cleared up.

Effects on Cross-Strait Policy

Turning to the implications of the legislative polls for Taiwan's relations with the PRC, most China and Taiwan watchers have stated that the Beijing government has been puzzled by its results and is now discussing intensively about its proper reaction.³ While this analysis is certainly difficult to be proven empirically, there is much reason to doubt at any serious change of China's Taiwan policy in the near future.⁴ In fact, the elections did not change the political status quo in the Taiwan strait nor did they bring any modification of the ROC's official approach to cross-strait policy. However, it is now most clear for the mainland authorities that the GMD's stand on the one-China principle which is closer to the Beijing government's interpretation than that of any other political party in Taiwan, is just "one out there in the market" – and one with considerable difficulties to (re)gain conceptual supremacy.

As a matter of fact, the PRC's assessment of Taiwan's mainland policy certainly depends on the degree to which post-election politics in Taiwan will reduce domestic tensions concerning the *tongdu*-issue, leading to a declining importance of unification as a perspective for cross-strait relations. If it comes to a stable domestic consensus with respect to the Republic of China's non-debatable and non-limited sovereignty; if the conceptual gaps between the different parties in Taiwan concerning mid- and long-term cross-strait (r)approachment narrow; and if such a development suggests to the Beijing government that there is no space to save the one-China principle by negotiation anymore, cross-strait relations could deteriorate dramatically. However, the new political setting on the island might trigger new conceptual initiatives for bilateral talks, fruitful cooperation and integration and, perhaps, ultimate unification, if this is what both sides want. To give some substance to such a hypothesis, it is useful to briefly sum up the main concepts on cross-strait policy as attached to the leading political parties and to the academic debate in present-day Taiwan.

The GMD's mainland policy has come under re-evaluation after the party's defeat in the 2000 presidential elections. In July 2001, a new confederation concept was made public as a GMD policy paper that arose considerable attention. However, it was not added to the party platform during the GMD's 29th National Congress at the end of the same month. As a matter of fact, the party leadership had decided to postpone the integration of the confederation concept into the party platform, because there

³ See "Scholars discuss Taiwan legislative elections", in: *Taipei Journal*, December 21st, 2001, p. 7.

⁴ However, there might be some change concerning the treatment of the DPP, as many scholars have predicted before and after the elections. This could have been indicated by recent remarks of mainland China's vice premier Qian Qichen saying that "the vast majority of DPP supporters differ from the small number of hardline Taiwan independence promoters" and claiming that politics should not interfere with economics. See "Taiwan Consistent in Policy Toward Mainland China, MAC", in: *Taiwan Headlines*, <http://www.portal.gio.tw>, 24.01.2002.

was still to much intra-party questioning of the advantages of such a move. However, the party leadership seems to be determined to continue promoting the concept, making it the cornerstone of its mainland policy.⁵

A Chinese confederation as thought of by the GMD-leadership serves as a transitory mechanism before a federation or even a unitary state can be installed. Such a confederation guarantees political sovereignty to both the PRC and the ROC for the time being, with close cooperation in the field of political, economic, and cultural exchanges envisaged. The concept is based on the '1992 consensus' that both sides of the Taiwan strait adhere to their own interpretation of what is 'one China'. Moreover, the very condition for reunification of the two sides remains the democratization of the PRC's political system. The confederation approach is very much in line with the Guidelines for National Unification, promulgated by the GMD government back in 1991. It seems to give a more familiar name to a factual state-to-state relationship that cannot be called this way for obvious political reasons – even if the GMD insists that a confederation only serves as a provisional model to pave the way for ultimate reunification some day in the future. Since the GMD has not set any time frame for unification, it is quite clear that the confederation concept is more strategic than ideological in nature: Cross-strait negotiations are supposed to gain steam under this approach, while the ROC's sovereignty is not put into jeopardy and unification transformed into a vision that is of no imminent or immediate importance for Taiwan.

Turning to the DPP, things are more complicated. The DPP-controlled Mainland Affairs Council, a government body, seems to focus more and more on an approach that is very much influenced by the integration model of the European Union. Future cross-strait relations should be put into a context of reciprocity and equality, a future China be conceived of as a relationship of "institutionalized coexistence" of both the mainland and Taiwan. The precise formula for such an existence is to be found through negotiations between the two sides of the Taiwan strait and should be discussed openly and wholeheartedly. From that perspective, it is not advisable to be more specific on the issue for now. Only if both sides are able to build mutual confidence by negotiations on economic and cultural exchange, talks on a common political structure could be set in motion at a later stage. However, such a structure should not compromise the continuing existence of the Republic of China.⁶

Discussing mainland policy with DPP leaders and department heads makes even more obvious the party's distance to any unification perspective. Here it is plainly stated that the DPP is striving for *permanent* political sovereignty of the Republic of China. Since this aim cannot be achieved for the time being, the best way is to suspend any discussion of the *tongdu* issue at all. For the DPP, any agreeable definition of the one-China principle excludes reunification, as long as it means Taiwan becoming a part of the PRC or merging with the PRC into a new and unified Chinese state – not today nor in the future. Actually, the DPP understands the one-China

⁵ Interview with Su Qi, currently convener of the National Security Division, National Policy Foundation, on September 7th, 2001. The NPF is a GMD think tank.

⁶ Interview with Chen Mingtong, Vice-chairman of the Mainland Affairs Council, on September 27th, 2001.

principle in terms of common cultural bonds and close cooperation, but not as a signifier of a unitary or federal Chinese state.⁷ This is the main difference between the GMD and the PFP on the one side and the DPP on the other. Consequently, the DPP's mainland policy focuses on practical issues of cross-strait contacts and rejects any proceeding discussion of the sovereignty issue. Once again, integration along the lines of the European example seems to be the most attractive policy approach. As a matter of fact, the DPP promotes the endless perpetuation of Taiwan's sovereignty under a one-China formula.

The *People's First Party*, a newcomer in Taiwanese politics, has tried to step into the middle ground between the GMD and the DPP, although it is generally assumed to be in the "pan-blue camp" of those parties advocating ultimate reunification of Taiwan and the mainland. As the DPP, it favours an approach of economic and functional integration first with talks on political integration later. As the GMD, it more or less supports the three-step approach to unification laid out in the Guidelines for National Unification – a framework that the DPP rejects. However, as no domestic consensus can be achieved on the *tongdu*-issue for now, the PFP wants to erase it from the agenda at least temporarily. Dialogue is more important than ideology, unification should and probably will be the result of practical cooperation. In that sense, the PFP does not want to develop any precise model for the resolution of the cross-strait conflict, but even abstain from such endeavours. Consequently, the PFP engages in the difficult attempt to reconcile a "Taiwan-first"-policy with the postulation for unification by leaving the latter less determined as in the GMD's confederation concept and more visible than in the DPP's mainland policy approach.⁸

The *New Party*, sidelined by the latest parliamentary elections in December 2001, basically underwrites to Beijing's model of 'one country, two systems' and reunification as soon as possible. However, as the other parties of the "pan-blue" camp, it sets the PRC's democratization as the main condition upon any reunification scenario. The NP today represents almost exclusively those old mainlanders who stick to the reunification aim for patriotic or nationalist reasons and not for predominantly strategic motives as in the case of the GMD. Currently, the NP is discussing intensively to return to the GMD in order to secure its clientele more voice in future Taiwanese politics⁹ – may be a wise thing to do, given the party's disastrous results in the recent legislative polls and its declining chances to survive in Taiwan's political landscape.

The *Taiwan Solidarity Union* has no independence platform, but just speaks of "special national relations" between the mainland and Taiwan. People on both sides are all considered to be Chinese with a common historico-cultural past that nobody denies. However, one nation does not necessarily converge with one single state, as not every state is identical to one specific nation. In that sense, Taiwan and the

⁷ Interview with Yan Jianfa, Director of the DPP's Chinese Affairs Department, on September 27th, 2001.

⁸ A brief chapter on the PFP's official mainland policy can be found on the party's homepage; see <http://www.pfp.org.tw>.

⁹ Information given to the author by sources close to the NP.

mainland could and should have close relations, while any change of the political status quo must be submitted to the sovereign vote of the people of Taiwan.¹⁰ Certainly, the TSU stands side by side with the DPP ideologically, but it wants to keep open the door for those GMD members who are ready to follow Li Denghui and his "Taiwan first"-policy. Actually, Taiwan's former president has sponsored the TSU's foundation in order to split the GMD's *bentu*-faction and to support the DPP government – a quite successful endeavour, as the recent legislative elections have proven.

Concerning the academic debate, most Taiwanese scholars – like most politicians – want to postpone any early decision on the *tongdu*-issue, while they never exclude unification explicitly and quite often affirm it as a long-term perspective. Two models that have gained considerable public attention and have also found access to the political debate in the recent past are the concept of a "third subject"¹¹ and the more general idea of a Chinese commonwealth,¹² both aiming at emulating the step-by-step approach of European economic and political integration. In general, there is a broad consensus within the academic (as within the political) debate that the key to de-escalate and solve the Sino-Taiwanese conflict is the economy. Any systematic conceptual thinking on cross-strait relations now seems to point at the instrumental value of putting common economic interests at the top of any effort to bring the two sides together. This separation of economics and politics seems to be good for the Taiwanese, but it is nevertheless risky: As long as the PRC does not underwrite to such a separation, growing economic integration contains the danger of Taiwan slowly being swallowed up by the mainland. What seems to be sensible in terms of securing political sovereignty at first sight, might therefore turn out to be compatible with Beijing's alleged strategy to hollow out this very same sovereignty by economic means in the long run. However, at this point Taiwanese scholars place emphasis on the long-term perspective of the integration model, implying that expected changes in the PRC's political environment in the near future will play into Taiwan's hands.

A "German" or a "European" model?

This said, trying to make use of the so-called "German model" as a conceptual tool to solve the Sino-Taiwanese conflict is not really supported by the ROC's political and academic elites. There are different reasons for this observation: Since the "German model" does not only advocate a two-states policy, but also adheres to the principle of national unity and unification, it is not acceptable for the "pan-green"-

¹⁰ Interview with Su Jinqiang, Secretary General of the TSU, on September 12th, 2001.

¹¹ Promoted by Taiwan political scientist Zhang Yazhong, this concept intends to bring the PRC and the ROC into a special new body representing "the whole of China" internationally, while making both sides working closely together in all fields relating to economics and politics. Internal sovereignty of both the PRC and the ROC would be guaranteed, while their shared ultimate aim would be unification. See Zhang Yazhong, "Liang'an tonghe: <Zhengge zhongguo> yu <disan zhuti> de jianli (Integrating the Two Sides of the Taiwan Strait: The Establishment of <The Whole of China> and <The Third Subject>)", in: *Lifayuan yuanwen yuekan*, Vol. 29, Nr. 337, May 2001, pp. 20-34. See also the author's *Liang'an tonghelun (On Integration Across the Taiwan Strait)*, Taipei (Shengzhi) 2000.

¹² See, for example, the contributions to Chen Yizi, *Zhongguo qiantu yu liangan guanxi (China's Future and Cross-Strait Relations)*, Taipei (Fengyun luntan) 1997.

camp of Taiwan's political parties that wants to leave the question of unification open at best. On the other hand, the "pan-blue"-camp is very sceptical of a "German solution", as its protagonists do not see any space for negotiations with the mainland because of the two-China policy that the model is openly advocating. Each side of the two camps accepts just one part of the "German model" while rejecting the other – unfortunately in an inverse way. Strictly spoken, the "German model" cannot serve as the basis for an overarching domestic consensus in present-day Taiwan concerning mainland policy and therefore should not be the cornerstone of any international effort to introduce a new conceptual framework for Sino-Taiwanese negotiations.¹³

Therefore, it makes more sense to think of a peaceful solution of the cross-strait conflict in terms of a model of gradual economic and political integration as historically developed and experienced in Western Europe. Such a model does not preclude unification of Taiwan and the mainland some day, nor does it force such a perspective upon any of the two sides. It leaves open much space for innovative structures that unification can gradually be built upon. However, political integration in such a model can only follow broad based economic and societal integration of the two sides and must strictly adhere to the principle of democratic consent. Doubtlessly, such an approach implies the acceptance of Taiwan's political sovereignty for the time being (as would be the case with the "German model", too). Supporting such an approach, German and European China Policy would have to be modified substantially, since the one-China principle as defined by the Beijing government could no longer be acknowledged. But taking issue with the power of patience and time so much valued by Chinese officials in public statements on Taiwan's future, the recognition of a sovereign Taiwan and the advocacy of continuing economic and cultural exchange as the most convincing means for peaceful unification corresponds best to the realities of the Sino-Taiwanese conflict. It also serves German and European commercial and political interests in the Asia-Pacific.

¹³ I am aware of taking some distance to my previous writing on the issue by this statement.