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The Taiwanese Dimension of the Cross–Strait Equation after the Sunflower Movement

For over five decades Taiwan was predominantly perceived by the international community as a function of regional balance of power network in East Asia and of the United States and People's Republic of China relations. However, after almost 30 years of democratic change, Taiwanese internal politics is slowly growing out of the diplomatic cross–strait framework and Beijing–Taipei economic rapprochement scenarios. The Sunflower Movement protests and November 29th, 2014 defeat of ruling Kuomintang in local elections indicate an introduction of a new variable – Taiwanese society – in cross–strait formula.

Keywords: *Taiwan, People's Republic of China, Cross–Strait Relations, Sunflower Movement*

1. Introduction

Cross–strait as well as internal Taiwanese politics developments during the second half of the last term of Taiwan's President Ma Ying-jeou show that both the Peoples' Republic of China (PRC) and Republic of China (ROC) relations are getting close to a political turning point. On one hand, Taiwan policymakers have to answer the question concerning the framework of future talks with the Mainland. The answer may jeopardize their political position in the years to come. On the other hand, PRC authorities understand that the full potential of Taiwan – Chinese relations based on the economic and political *status quo* has already been reached. In the coming years Chi-

na's preferences may not be as (relatively) easily taken into consideration as they were during Ma Ying-jeou Presidency. The future of PRC–ROC relations will require substantial political decisions of both parties.

The goal of the article is to analyze and present the importance of developments in Taiwanese internal politics in the abovementioned context. ROC's part of the cross-strait puzzle will be reconstructed on the basis of discussions with experts in Taiwan (in particular Soochow University Political Sciences Department, but also politicians and social activists), of analysis of social and political attitudes of the Taiwanese public opinion (the research was conducted (1) during and right after the occupation of Legislative Yuan in March 2014, (2) during the Russian–Ukraine Crimea crisis, (3) 25 years after the Tiananmen Square protests – thus scientific discussions on China's political reforms were abundant) and of document analysis. As the Taiwanese internal politics dimension of cross-strait relations seems to be often overlooked in Europe, the research is also an introduction case study of relations between the young Asian democracy and the PRC.

On the basis of the field work conducted in the first half of 2014, despite, in tactical terms, an almost certain increase of electoral dynamics in coming months, in strategic terms, the political scenario for the coming years concerning ROC–PRC relations is to a large extent set. The key to the political developments on the Taiwanese side of the cross-strait equation is the ruling Kuomintang's (KMT's) ability to take a step back, reassess the situation and reorganize. It still possesses the biggest political (and financial) potential as well as a relatively stable social base and enough popular political personalities to substitute the unpopular ruling president and to win with the opposition Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), which is still perceived by a significant part of the society as too bellicose to govern vis-à-vis Mainland China. The possible instability involves two critical junctures, partly beyond the control of the actors involved: possible conflict of ambitions between President Ma and the KMT or possible regional security crisis involving the PRC.

2. Taiwanese Socio–Economic Background of the Cross–Strait Relations

Peaceful rapprochement between Taiwan and the PRC observed throughout the first and a part of the second term of President Ma Ying-jeou in office was founded on two pillars: deepening economic cooperation

and high level diplomacy. The KMT Government based its strategy mostly on building closer economic ties with the Mainland while claiming that no political consequences were involved. The strategy was realized mostly in the public dimension with the apparent intention to limit popular involvement in obviously complex negotiations. This suited both the PRC's preference for top–down approach to international politics and President Ma's ambitions to be an architect of a new chapter in Taiwan–PRC relations' history. It seems that such a political practice has reached its limits, though. The first and the most obvious sign was the Sunflower Movement and occupation of Legislative Yuan in March 2014. Regardless of how debatable the Sunflower Movement remains (compare Hengjun 2014; Chen 2014), the social discontent behind it highlighted three major characteristics of Taiwanese political reality which were earlier underestimated in political talks with the Mainland.

First, the Taiwanese democracy is too strong not to be taken into account in high level diplomacy between Taiwan and the PRC. Taiwanese citizens seem not to accept any form of "managed democracy" anymore. It does not mean Taiwan's democracy is perfect. It does not even mean it is mature. While walking around Legislative Yuan sit–ins in March 2014 it was sometimes hard not to have the impression of witnessing a naïvely idealistic political happening. However, it was beyond discussion that the Taiwanese civic consciousness and democratic attitude became more than just instruments of local politics. In particular, the young generations raised in a post–martial law democratic environment perceive their right to participate in the political process as natural. They are independent elements of political reality that have to be taken into account by all the actors involved in Taiwanese politics or cross–strait dialogue.

Second, modes of thought of most of the established Taiwanese politicians have been changing too slowly since the end of the Martial Law (1949–1987) to fully match the modern social reality of the island. Just as the KMT under President Ma seems to have come back to an autocratic approach in managing the affairs of the state, so the DPP still has not rearranged its political tactics and too often depends on drastic, bellicose measures remembered from the first sessions of the free elected Legislative Yuan. The best proofs were the KMT's temptation to turn Legislative Yuan into a rubber stamp parliament in case of the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (ECFA) related regulations or explanations of DPP officials, that radical attitude is the only way to

win the attention of the public – just like it was in the first democratic years in the 1990s. Meanwhile, both dominant Taiwanese political parties did not prevent the growing part of the society from losing trust in politicians and turning its back on official channels of political communication.

Finally, regardless how paradox this may sound, the Taiwanese political scene lacked effective opposition. The DPP electoral win was a consequence of KMT failure rather than of DPP success. Obviously, the DPP remained the only force able to confront the KMT on the national political scene. However, it had no clear image of itself other than opposing the KMT far beyond the extent justified by the disproportion of political, social and financial assets between them. Despite an increase of popularity in opinion polls it seemed to be satisfied with being a label for opposition movements rather than a fully developed political alternative to the KMT (Decision Making Research 2015; *Liberty Times* 2015; Taiwan Indicator Survey Research 2015; TVBS Poll Center 2015). This led to a situation when the political scene was dominated by one party – the KMT – with a still strong organization and financial support, while the role of the opposition was to highlight potential problems not taken into account by the ruling party. At the same moment the opposition had no viable program how to actually deal with these problems, leaving the decision to the ruling party, which is particularly visible in the context of policies regarding economic cooperation with the PRC.¹

These developments influence not just Taiwanese internal politics. PRC central authorities understand that the opportunities for active cooperation with Taipei are dropping down. Although the Sunflower Movement did not become the central element of the recent electoral campaigns in Taiwan, the social tensions that exploded in March 2014 translated into the worse ever results of the KMT in local elections (*The Economist* 2014) and eventually into a loss in the parliamentary and presidential elections in 2015, making future Taiwanese authorities less conciliatory to Beijing than under President Ma. The Mainland authorities have to look beyond ongoing political changes in Taipei and notice fundamental processes that have taken place in the Island over the last twenty years.

1 For example, during meetings with the diplomatic corps, DPP representatives did not present alternative policies and limited themselves to criticizing the KMT and working on their PR skills. For a thorough analysis of DPP development and strategies that still shape the public image of the party see: Rigger 2011.

First, China has to find the way to counteract the slow but steady changes in dynamics of the Taiwanese economy. As the PRC's economy slows down and labor prices go up, Taiwanese enterprises, especially big ones, may slowly start to relocate their assets and naturally turn to other more attractive venues in East and Southeast Asia. If one takes into consideration that it is mostly big businesses that represent Taiwan in the PRC, the decrease of the PRC's political leverage on Taiwan may be noticeable. Of course it is impossible to absolutely substitute the Mainland by other destinations but economic diversification is not out of the question. After all, the Taiwanese economy had been developing before China's rise and Taiwanese businessmen have years of experience in entrepreneurship in the challenging international environment. Such developments may work against PRC interests by weakening the strongest incentive for closer cooperation with the Mainland.

Second, the Mainland has to manage the mounting negative social perceptions of Chinese investment in Taiwan. March 2014 highlighted the fact that for the Taiwanese public it is obvious that the Chinese economic expansion has a political background. A population of 20 million with an enormous export sector and high domestic saturation of services obviously is not a promised land for the PRC. Basing on purely economic analysis it may be assumed that Taiwan will not be flooded with Chinese business, if deals concerning free trade and free services will be accepted. Such an argument has one hidden flaw, though. If Taiwan is a relatively unattractive market for Chinese expansion and in the same moment is a political problem for the PRC, why would the Mainland push for closer economic cooperation. Thus, large scale Mainland investment is most often explained by an assumed political (and hostile to Taiwan) agenda. And it is hard to call such a stance of Taiwanese business circles exaggerated as Taiwanese businessmen have already expanded to the Mainland and have practical experience of the business reality in China. This also translates into a failure of the Mainland's soft power.

Third, China has to notice the socio-economic evolution of Taiwanese society. When the policy of economic engagement was introduced, the Taiwanese were still relatively coherent and egalitarian. These times are over, though. There is a growing gap between big business elites able to invest in the Mainland and the rest of the society. Thus, for the first time in Taiwanese modern history economic disparity becomes a social issue dividing the small and medium entrepreneurs, who form the majority

of the society and are afraid of competition with their counterparts from the Mainland, and big business representatives, who, thanks to economic assets, were closer to the KMT government, are interested in increasing service and trade mobility, and are far less dependent on the Taiwanese internal market. The interests of these two groups are different, sometimes contradictory, which generates a potential for new political divisions in the future. Taiwan has witnessed the first wave of alter-globalist discontent with modern capitalist system, which, because of the above-mentioned nature and consequences of investment in China, becomes naturally associated with integration with the PRC.

Despite the fact that the Deng Xiaoping's "two systems one country" approach introduced in the case of Hong Kong was originally designed for unification with Taiwan, it does not seem to be applicable in the cross-strait reality. The policy of "the Mainland buying out Taiwan" had run into obstacles requiring a change in the nature of the Taiwan-PRC dialogue. The Taiwanese economy is largely dependent on the Chinese market but diversification of Taiwanese investment is already slowly taking place. It is worth emphasizing that while the process is not entirely politically driven – Taiwan is a free market economy and Taiwanese businessmen realize the consequences of the Chinese economy slowing down – the Chinese economic expansion is politically motivated, which was already no longer possible to camouflage behind the high level diplomatic rapprochement of the Xi Jinping and Ma Ying-jeou administrations. The Taiwanese-PRC economic integration changed the Taiwanese reality not always in a way that is accepted by the society of the island. It seems that both the China and Taiwan administrations have to realize that the economic venue of closing the political gap between actors on the both sides of the strait is not entirely under their control. In some aspects it even seems to be working against them.

3. Taiwanese Political Background of the Cross-Strait Relations

The most obvious sign of changes going under the radar of the high level diplomatic rapprochement between Taiwan and China was the Sunflower Movement. To the politicians' surprise students for almost a month peacefully occupied the Taiwanese legislature – Legislative Yuan. Although

the protests in March 2014 were organized against the ratification of the Cross–Strait Service Trade Agreement, negotiated between ROC and PRC authorities under the ECFA umbrella, in the broader perspective they should be interpreted as an emanation of political, economic and social changes going on unnoticed by the institutions of the political system.² All the undesired consequences of President Ma's strategy suddenly resurfaced and turned out to be beyond the control of any political actor.

In the described circumstances, the key issue in terms of possible trajectories of development of Taiwan–PRC political relations was the political attitude of President Ma Ying-jeou. President Ma faced a problem whether to approach the modified model of “one China” proposed by the Mainland in a friendly manner. On one hand, it may have led to the acceleration of the unification process. On the other hand, it would not have been accepted easily by all Taiwanese citizens, most of whom seemed to prefer retaining the possible maximum of available sovereignty from China. The state of relations between Taiwan and the PRC seemed to be greatly influenced by his personal ambitions making the future to a relatively large extent dependent on his political decisions (excluding the possibility of regional security crisis involving the PRC). As far as formulating the answers to both questions is concerned, it seemed that his personal views and preferences may have been as important as political and economic calculations. It has to be emphasized, that he was the head of the strongest political party in Taiwan and the head of the public administration – what had put him in the very center of both Taiwanese politics and the cross–strait dialogue. Thus, to a large extent the way he tackled these problems had determined the outcome of the ROC 2016 electoral puzzle and the future of relations with the PRC.

Throughout the 25 years after lifting martial law the approach of both dominating political parties, the KMT and DPP, to relations with the PRC in Taiwan became much more balanced.³ Actually both have resigned from the most radical propositions concerning declaring independence or unification. Despite the fact that the DPP and KMT still largely perceive each other in a 20th century context,⁴ the most radical stances: full unifi-

2 For thorough economic and political analysis of the ECFA see: Chow (ed.) 2012.

3 For an exquisite analysis of the evolution of party politics in Taiwan see: Fell 2012, especially: pp. 84–112.

4 It seems that the demographic situation plays an important role here. The Taiwanese society experiences a demographic decline with an overrepresentation of older generations. From the political competition perspective, it creates a situation when the expe-

cation or outright independence, slowly became marginal. There seems to be three major historical reasons for that.

First, both major Taiwanese parties had largely eliminated the competition and broadened their electoral platforms. This process, just like in the case of any maturing democracy, leads the dominant parties to moderate their approaches to fit the broader range of followers. For example, terms “Blue” or “Green” are more and more often associated with the KMT and DPP respectively, and less with Pan-blue and Pan-green coalitions of political parties. Another example is the relatively low support for the Taiwan Solidarity Union, which is the most radical party advocating Taiwan’s full independence present in Legislative Yuan.⁵ The same fate was met by the New Party, which was created as a result of a departure of the right wing pro-unification KMT members from the KMT in the 1990s (Central Election Commission; “Frozen Garlic”). It seems that both the DPP and KMT try to control its radical members not to lose its steady and wide pools of supporters.

Second, even the short history of democratic Taiwan shows that radical propositions raise the risk of party splits, which in turn lead without an exception to worse electoral performance. The best example is the split in the KMT at the beginning of the 21st century, which resulted in the first victory of DPP candidate Chen Shui-bian in presidential elections. Despite the fact that the KMT originating candidates, James Soong and Lien Chan, together had more supporters than the DPP candidate, none of them were able to beat Chen Shui-bian individually (Fell 2012, p. 60). Another example is the People First Party, created as a result of James Soong’s split with the KMT, which slowly loses social support (Central Election Commission; “Frozen Garlic”). One may conclude that Taiwanese politicians have learned to avoid radical forms of disputes between party factions.

Finally, one should not forget about the deterioration of relations with the PRC during the first and second term of DPP presidency. It was largely an effect of Chinese hostile reactions toward Chen Shui-bian’s real and alleged moves toward Taiwanese full independence. Despite the fact that in the short run Taiwanese business found ways to go around PRC

riences of people still remembering the end of martial law may dominate the younger generations, which are naturally less inclined to perceive the political situation through historical lenses and still further away from political decision-making circles.

5 For survey results since 2000 check: Central Election Commission; “Frozen Garlic.”

restrictions and continue investment in the Mainland, lack of developments in the public dimension of international relations created space for closer Korean–PRC economic ties, what in the long run translated into the deterioration of the competitiveness of Taiwanese economy.⁶ These developments seem to have made both dominant political parties and the Taiwanese society as a whole less prone to radicalism and more conciliatory towards the PRC, as well as made radicals in both parties reconsider their stances. The limits of this conciliatory attitude was shown by the Sunflower Movement, though.

When it comes to contemporary relations with the PRC, their picture is strongly influenced by President's Ma Ying-jeou personal ambitions. The president became an icon of pro–Chinese policies and his increasingly autocratic approach in enforcing them has led him to a one digit support in the polls (Muynard 2010). This situation provided the DPP with political ammunition as well as led to visible tensions within the KMT. If one analyses the president's biography more closely however, the scope of his autocratic ambitions is far less surprising. In the beginning of the 1990s, he was serving for a period of time (1991–1993) as a deputy of the Mainland Affairs Council (MAC), a cabinet–level body in charge of cross–strait relations. He was also showing a predilection to look for some sort of unifying agreement with the PRC. It is remarkable that many observers of Taiwanese politics expected him then to join the New Party – representing a radically pro–unification political stance (Ming–sho 2010). It is also worth remembering that as a Justice Minister he opposed some initiatives to cancel the remains of martial law in the penal code (Wang 2011). At the early stage of his career he was sometimes even labeled as opposing democratic reforms.

All the aforementioned issues seemed to be covered by his popular anti–corruption campaign and successful mayoral rule in Taipei (1998–2006). Throughout his first presidential term he was also perceived in sharp contrast with the unfolding and unprecedented political scandal concerning his predecessor – Chen Shui–bian (*The Guardian* 2009). This has certainly worked in favor of Ma's more positive picture. However, already then he was obviously eager to ameliorate the relations with the PRC. After Ma Ying–jeou formally took office, his policies have been largely pro–PRC and have been seen by critics as part of a long–run scheme to

6 For example, advances in Republic of Korea (ROK) – PRC Free Trade Agreement talks – ROK is the major competitor for Taiwanese IT industry.

steer Taiwan to eventual unification. Already in 2008 Ma stated that he hopes that a cross-strait peace accord could be reached during his term in office. Some critics even argue that Ma, rather than follow his campaign promise (“no reunification, no independence, and no war”), has been following his father’s will instead, Ma Ho-ling (a Director at Youth Supervision Committee of the Executive Yuan and Vice Chairman of Performance Committee of KMT) whose final words were “Repress independence supporters; Lead (Taiwan) to unification” (*The Wall Street Journal* 2015). His ambitions have even brought common jokes about his will to be the first Taiwanese president to shake hands with the president of the PRC, which turned out to be true in last months of his presidency.⁷

One may put a general statement that while a more resolute stance toward China has been more popular in Taiwan, President Ma has shown increasing fondness to reach out to the PRC. In effect, he was one of the least popular Taiwanese politicians, representing the KMT’s old guard’s rather than society’s views on cross-strait relations. However, as the head of the public administration he was still able to enforce his will regardless of public criticism. As the chairman of the KMT he kept pushing the party toward a more pro-Chinese stance than actually the majority of KMT officials enjoy. This even led to KMT infighting, highlighted by the Ma Ying-jeou – Wang Jin-pyng (the President of Legislative Yuan, KMT member) conflict during the Sunflower Movement protests (*The South China Morning Post* 2013).

According to political logic, it seems that with the end of Ma Ying-jeou’s second presidential term the KMT should go back to a more balanced approach to PRC–Taiwan relation related issues. Such calculation is based on the fact that the KMT as a political party should care about

7 For many observers Ma’s increasingly conciliatory approach toward the PRC is particularly visible in terms of evolution of his attitude toward the Tiananmen Square Protests. Prior to his election as ROC President, Ma was known to be a very vocal supporter of the Chinese democratic movement and had stated that unless Beijing admitted their wrongdoings at the Tiananmen Square Protests, there would be no talks about reunification. This changed dramatically after he won the presidential race. Especially DPP officials and followers criticize him for praising the PRC on human rights and his steady departure from his mayoral times’ critical view of the Communists’ handling of the 1989 protests. This was vividly apparent in June 2009, during the anniversary of Tiananmen Square, when a leader of the Chinese democracy movement and then student leader Wang Dan visited Taiwan, as in previous years, to meet with Ma to discuss about human rights and democracy in China. Ma postponed the appointment several times and eventually cancelled it. In a press meeting with DPP Chairwoman Tsai Ing-wen, Wang Dan remarkably noticed how different from “Mayor Ma of Taipei City” has “President Ma” become.

building a stable electoral base, which requires adapting a less pro-unification approach than the one represented by the present president. Unfortunately for KMT too much depended on how Ma Ying-jeou would exercise power, though. He had proven to be ready to use it to push his view forward (the service-pact case being the most evident example) and to use exclusion from KMT membership as a tool to subordinate inner party opposition (Ma-Wang conflict during Legislative Yuan occupation, reshuffling in the public administration in the middle of the 2014). Months before parliamentary elections the KMT candidates seemed to be caught in between the president's ambitions and society's electoral preferences. As Ma had enforced his will and kept on promoting pro-unification members with a long political history, he created an unfavorable image of the party petrified in the past and lose a lot of electoral appeal. In the future however, if KMT members manage to distance the party from Ma's stance and push forward younger and more popular representatives, they will be able to capitalize on the strong electoral base and unparalleled financial and administrative support to rebuild the earlier, dominant political position.

4. What Comes Next

November 29, 2014, proved to be a shocking day for the KMT. After a decade of dominance in local government and Parliament, it suffered the worst defeat in the island's electoral history. It kept hold of just 6 of the 22 municipalities and counties, while the opposition – the DPP – scored 13 for its side (Huang 2014). Many foreign observers attribute the results to a setback in cross-strait talks between Taiwan and China caused by the Sunflower Movement and to the Hong Kong protests that came a few months later. However, while the Sunflower Movement and Grand Central sit-ins have been catching the foreign media's attention, in Taiwan they were in a background rather than in the fore of the political campaign. From the local perspective, the November elections' results were yet another proof that the leading Taiwanese politicians' ambitions cloud the aspirations of the society they represent (Glaser & Vitello 2014). The Parliamentary and Presidential elections' results were just a mere confirmation of this fact.

The loss creates a space for soul-searching and correcting the political course. In the longer run, according to electoral logic it seems that with the end of Ma Ying-jeou's second presidential term the KMT should develop

an approach more centered on Taiwanese issues and go back to more balanced approach to PRC–Taiwan relations. Such calculation is based on the fact that the KMT as a political party should respond to the electorate's preferences and adapt more socially conscious policies emphasizing a less pro-unification approach than one represented by the present president and KMT old-timers. Middle level KMT candidates seemed to be caught in between the president's ambitions and society's electoral preferences. The question of central importance concerns the KMT's approach to the challenge. It seems that the key problem is to find new impulses for economic development as the limits of socially acceptable economic and cultural integration within the existing framework of contacts with the PRC have been reached. The inability of the KMT to make Taiwan business and society to overcome limitations in regard to international, non-Chinese competition, remains the most important issue here. From a social perspective the 2010 ECFA and one-sided Taiwanese concessions are not entirely functional for Taiwan. This generates growing social frustration which can no longer remain not addressed.

However, it is worth noting that such a state of facts is not functional also for the PRC. The fundamental goal of the Mainland is to further accelerate the cross-strait dialogue. PRC leaders are conscious that they urgently need to begin the political dialogue with Taiwan, as the term of Ma Ying-jeou comes to an end in 2015 (presidential elections will take place in January 2016) and many political forecasts show a growing possibility of a victory of his political opposition.⁸ This in turn may slow down and limit Beijing's opportunities to peacefully exercise influence on Taiwanese politics. However, if the political dialogue is to accelerate within the today's framework of ROC–PRC relationships, the framework itself is insufficient to develop a sustainable political dialogue with Taiwan.⁹ Thus, from the Mainland's perspective the goal for the coming years is to develop together with Taiwan a common understanding of the "one China" policy, which may allow to accelerate the political dialogue.

The goals of Beijing's policies toward Taiwan seem to be concentrated on the development of a positive image of the PRC based on soft power rather than economic omnipotence. This is confirmed by readiness to

8 Editor's note: presidential election was won by DPP Chairperson Tsai Ing-wen.

9 The 1992 consensus assumes a wider scope of Taiwan international space, development of military trust and finally peace agreement.

sign the ECFA agreement and to erect trade offices on both sides of the strait. One may form a conclusion that the PRC is somehow ready to acknowledge the administrative jurisdiction of Taipei on Taiwan. Accepting Taiwan administrative competencies has its limits, like not accepting “two Chinas” in practice of international organizations, though. Taiwan’s activity in some international organizations as a non–state and de–sovereignized entity was accepted by the PRC. Thus, one may state that Taiwan’s pressure on broadening the scope of international organizations it is active in, is a sort of a confirmation to the international community that Taiwan acknowledges such a status. This leads to a conclusion that the consequences of President Ma’s political success in 2008 were: (a) strengthening the administrative independence at the cost of limiting sovereignty, and (b) strengthening Taiwanese consciousness of the society at the expense of more passive approach to the unification scenarios. However, after several years these processes are conflicting with one another, as the Sunflower Movement has showcased.¹⁰

The changes in Taiwanese internal politics raise a more general question about the nature of the Taiwan’s future international behavior. The strategy of the KMT–PRC getting closer was possible in context of the PRC’s economic rise and the PRC’s growing soft power. It was realized on the basis of high level diplomatic involvement. It seems that the strategy grew too old to match the 2016 Taiwanese reality. The PRC’s economy slowed down, which slowly makes Taiwanese business to look for other markets. The PRC’s soft power suffered due to the Hong Kong protests. The high level talks without consulting the public were one of the reasons of the Sunflower Movement formation. It seems that Taiwanese democracy is simply too strong to be managed the way it was before.

From the foreign perspective it is important to emphasize that the cross–strait relations actually played a secondary role in the 2015 parliamentary and presidential campaign. It is also important to notice that

10 One should also take into account a potential international crisis involving the PRC – especially in the vicinity of Taiwan, which may generate an electoral swing against the KMT. The way the PRC has been dealing with the Crimea crisis seems to point out that China is still able to exercise a balanced and sublime international strategy to appease international society. The East China and South China Seas are a different problem, though. Taiwanese society after March 2014, especially young voters, may be more afraid of the PRC’s ambitions regarding Taiwan (Beijing’s soft power definitely suffered because of the Sunflower Movement, not to mention occasional setbacks, like the academic scandal during the Confucius Institute conference in Portugal in August 2014).

the results did not cause significant changes in relations with the Mainland. Throughout the campaign the DPP candidates pledged to keep good relations with PRC sister cities and not to rock the boat in case they win. Numerous candidates promised to continue and facilitate business with the Mainland. In fact, the DPP representatives active in local government prior to the elections already have a good record in that respect. The local population is obviously weary of excessive rapprochement and the way the Mainland managed the Hong Kong protests tarnished the image of the PRC even further. However, opposite to foreign assessments the cross-strait dialogue was never a dominant element of the campaign.

The possibility of changes in Taiwanese politics, both in terms of change of guard within the KMT and of DPP electoral wins in 2016, requires to maintain a higher than before level of attention to the domestic developments in Taiwan. It also requires to further monitor the PRC policy toward Taiwan as it may become a swing factor in the island's internal affairs. President Xi's harder approach with no apparent new incentives for Taiwanese to continue along the PRC-ROC course under Ma will definitely play against the interests of advocates of further rapprochement. It may also work against the PRC's interest in the context of the United States (US) presidential elections in 2016, when relations between the US and PRC may be exposed to many tests. Nevertheless, if China is planning to keep what it has already gained, it needs to depend more on encouragement than threat.

It is also high time for the Western countries to notice the social consensus around the democratic system in Taiwan. Taiwan belongs to the democratic world. It corresponds to something more than just formal institutions. It refers to common democratic values remarkably implemented in Taiwan. As the electoral dust settled the most important aspect in Taiwanese politics proved to be, both in internal and international terms, the growing identification of the local population as Taiwanese rather than Chinese, especially among the young generation. In the future this involves a possibility of growing aspirations of the islanders for recognition on terms at odds with Beijing. Those who more closely follow the cross-strait dialogue may point out, that it is not the first time when Taiwanese identity resurfaces in regional politics. One of accusations against Chen Shui-bian was to play this card in the DPP political campaign, with no regards for the stability of relations with the

Mainland. This time however, it started to develop genuinely outside of the formal political establishment. By all means it is a factor that should not be underestimated in the complex geopolitical reality of the South and East China Sea.

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