

Heads of Competent Authorities for Cross-Strait Affairs Successfully Hold First Meeting, Setting an Important Milestone for the Benign Development, Pragmatism and Progress of Cross-Strait Relations

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The Mainland Affairs Council (MAC) stated today (February 11, 2014) that MAC Minister Wang Yu-chi and Director Zhang Zhijun of the Mainland's Taiwan Affairs Office (TAO) held the first meeting between the heads of the competent authorities for cross-strait affairs in Nanjing, mainland China. The MAC said that the successful meeting is an important milestone in the development of cross-strait relations and has positive implications for the normalization of official interactions and exchanges across the Taiwan Strait. In a speech presented at the meeting, Minister Wang stated that the start of this phase of interaction concretely demonstrates the willingness of the two sides to objectively face affairs, and plays great significance in the progress of pragmatically handling cross-strait issues and safeguarding the public's well-being between the two sides.

The MAC stated that, under the principles of equality and dignity, the two sides agreed to establish a liaison and communication mechanism between the MAC and TAO to pragmatically discuss and address major issues deriving from cross-strait interactions and exchanges. The mechanism will handle issues such as high-level exchange visits by the heads of the two organizations and strengthening of communication channels between the operational departments (bureaus) on both sides. Under the mechanism, the two sides have agreed to grant facilitation measures for the entry-exit and customs clearance of related personnels in keeping with the principle of equality and mutual benefit and in adherence to respective laws and regulations.

Regarding the issue of humanitarian visiting functions for the reciprocal institutions of the SEF and the ARATS, Minister Wang emphasized during the meeting that the main objective of the institutions' establishment is to promptly and effectively serve the people. During the meeting, Minister Wang said that Taiwan's institution functions should include the right to visit Taiwanese citizens whose personal freedom have been restricted in the Mainland. The two sides also agreed to more proactively discuss feasible measures and pragmatically handle issues related to the establishment of reciprocal institutions.

Minister Wang also expressed hope in the meeting for the Mainland to provide proper medical coverage for Taiwanese students in the Mainland. Zhang Zhijun expressed the willingness to more substantively implement medical coverage for Taiwanese students at Mainland tertiary education and scientific research institutes, so that they may also be included in the basic medical insurance program for urban residents, on par with local students. Minister Wang affirmed and welcomed the value placed by the Mainland on the issue of medical coverage for Taiwanese students at Mainland schools, and also stated that the Taiwan side should continue to actively push for the inclusion of Mainland students in Taiwan into the Taiwan National Health Insurance program, so that both Taiwanese and Mainland students may enjoy friendly learning and living environment.

In response to proposals raised by the Mainland side to promptly resolve issues related to living conveniences for reporters stationed on each other's side, Minister Wang emphasized that, at this stage, the two sides should discuss this matter in tandem with the issue of the reciprocal exchange of news information across the Strait, so as to facilitate improvement of the overall environment for cross-strait news information, as well as continue to provide conveniences for stationed reporters. Furthermore, the two sides will also continue to promote cross-strait

exchanges in cultural, education, technology and other spheres.

Regarding joint cross-strait participation in regional economic integration, Minister Wang emphasized that promoting accession to the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) Agreement and Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) Agreement is a major economic and trade priority for Taiwan at this time. Deepening and expanding cross-strait economic cooperation and joint cross-strait participation in regional economic integration should "advance side by side," he said. As Taiwan's linkages with the regional and global economies grow closer, public confidence in and support for cross-strait economic and trade liberalization will increase, which in turn will be beneficial to the signing of follow-up cross-strait agreements under the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (ECFA).

The MAC stated that achievements in the development of cross-strait relations over the past nearly six years had set an invaluable model and earned a high level of support from the international community. The pragmatic and frank exchange of views on important cross-strait issues during the first meeting between the heads of the competent authorities for cross-strait affairs on the two sides represents an important milestone in the benign development of cross-strait relations. The MAC stressed that the "1992 Consensus" is the crux of institutionalized cross-strait negotiations, interactions and exchanges. In the future, both sides should continue to promote mutually beneficial relations across the Strait so that the people on both sides can enjoy the fruits of the peaceful development of cross-strait relations. Minister Wang also formally invited Director Zhang Zhijun to lead a delegation to visit Taiwan so as to gain deeper awareness and understanding of Taiwanese society and popular sentiment.