

Deputy Minister Shih: Gradual Enhancement of Institutionalized Cross-Strait Negotiations and Official Interaction Lays Cornerstone for Cross-Strait Peace and Safeguards the People's Well-Being

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Deputy Minister Shih Hui-fen of the Mainland Affairs Council (MAC) said today (December 11, 2015) that institutionalized cross-strait negotiations and meetings and exchange visits between the heads of cross-strait competent authorities have laid a solid foundation for long-term peaceful development in cross-strait relations and created favorable conditions for talks between the leaders of the two sides. The government will continue its endeavors to maintain peaceful and stable cross-strait ties, strengthen safeguards for the public's well-being, and enhance Taiwan's international competitiveness.

The MAC and Southern Taiwan Joint Services Center, Executive Yuan (STJSC) jointly held a town hall meeting in Kaohsiung, co-chaired by Deputy Minister Shih and Deputy Chief Executive Officer Wu Li-cheng. Officials from the Ministry of Economic Affairs, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Transportation and Communications, Council of Agriculture and other agencies also participated to jointly explain issues concerning the cross-strait policy to the people. Through this mutual communication channel, local views from various sectors were expressed, and the suggestions provided shall serve as an important reference for follow-up policy planning.

Deputy Minister Shih said that peaceful development in cross-strait relations is one of the three pillars of Taiwan's national security, along with flexible diplomacy and military strength. Over the past seven-plus years, the government has continued to promote cross-strait negotiations and exchanges and official interaction on the foundation of the "1992 Consensus" of "one China, with respective interpretations." This has achieved the policy objectives of "consolidating sovereignty, strengthening Taiwan, and realizing cross-strait peace."

Deputy Minister Shih explained that institutionalized negotiations between the SEF and ARATS, and the agreements signed and implemented by the two sides are closely related to the rights, interests and livelihood of the people. Over the past seven-plus years, the SEF and the ARATS have held 11 high-level talks, all under the

premise of "national need, public support, and legislative oversight." They have also signed 23 agreements, laying the solid foundation through "building blocks" approach that reflects public concern, creates an orderly environment for cross-strait exchanges and strengthens protection of the people's rights and interests. At the latest round of talks, the two sides signed two agreements. The Cross-Strait Agreement on Avoidance of Double Taxation and Enhancement of Tax Cooperation will reduce the income tax burden on the people and businesses of both sides, increase the competitiveness of enterprises, and enhance the benefits for the people, businesses, and government. The Cross-Strait Collaboration Agreement on Flight Safety and Airworthiness will enhance the safety of direct cross-strait flights, improve passenger convenience, and promote development of the civil aviation industry. In addition, the government will further build on the substantive benefits of the signed cross-strait agreements and implemented policy measures through various channels (such as the Meeting on Cross-Strait Agreement Benefits and Promotion recently held by the SEF and the ARATS).

Deputy Minister Shih indicated that the process of promoting cross-strait negotiations has gradually deepened mutual trust between the two sides and helped to promote the normalization of interaction between the heads of cross-strait competent authorities. In February last year (2014), the heads of the MAC and TAO held the first Meeting between Heads of Cross-Strait Competent Authorities and mutually addressed each other by their official titles. To date, the two sides have conducted four meetings and exchange visits, as well as established and continuously operated normal communication and liaison mechanisms between them. Interaction has been gradually upgraded on this basis, which in turn created opportunities for the meeting between the leaders of the two sides. The realization of this cross-strait leaders' meeting has tremendous historic significance and has ushered in the most peaceful situation in the 60 plus years of separate governance across the Taiwan Strait.

President Ma and Mainland leader Xi Jinping conducted their first meeting at the Singapore Shangri-La Hotel. The main objective of this meeting was to "consolidate cross-strait peace and maintain the status quo in the Taiwan Strait." During the meeting, the two sides expressed their stance on the development of cross-strait relations and exchanged views on maintaining cross-strait peace and development. President Ma not only proposed to maintain the status quo of cross-strait peace and prosperity, but also fully elaborated upon the significance of the "1992 Consensus" of "one China, with respective interpretations," which thereby fully demonstrated the sovereignty and dignity of the Republic of China (ROC). He also appealed to the Mainland to acknowledge the security and dignity concerns of the Taiwanese people

on matters of military threat and international space. The meeting has far-reaching significance for the long-term development of cross-strait relations and has also created a historic model for cross-strait and regional stability.

Participants in the town hall meeting today spoke enthusiastically on the direction of cross-strait relations and related issues, including promoting cross-strait economic and trade exchanges to help invigorate Taiwan's economy, strengthening cross-strait cultural and educational exchanges, and further allowing Mainland students to study in Taiwan. Deputy Minister Shih, Deputy Chief Executive Officer Wu, and other agency representatives gave detailed explanations on each of these issues during the spirited exchanges.