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Toward a Principled Integration of East Asia: Concept of an East Asian Community (4)

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Several Principles and Approaches

Having presented the issues as I see them, let me set forth here several principles and approaches regarding regional cooperation in East Asia, based on the positions expressed by the Japanese government at the ASEAN + 3 Foreign Ministers' Meetings and other forums.

The first principle is “open regionalism.” The stability and prosperity of East Asia depend not only on intraregional relations but also on maintaining friendly ties with countries outside the region. The East Asian economies could not grow without the benefits of trade and investment with the United States, Europe, and other countries and regions, and from the WTO and other stabilizing institutions in the international economic system. Stability in East Asia is also supported by the U.S. military presence, which is predicated on the Japan–U.S. security arrangements. Accordingly, regional cooperation to realize the concept of an East Asian community should be advanced as open regionalism, based on the principles of openness, transparency, and inclusiveness. This will benefit both the region and the international community. It will also serve to quell apprehensions of those who contend that East Asian regional integration may lead to the creation of a closed economic bloc.

The second principle is the “functional approach.” Premised on actual situations, rather than trying to build comprehensive institutional frameworks from the outset (the “institutional approach”), the functional approach focuses regional cooperation on cooperation in “functional” fields, such as FTAs, finance, the environment, energy, transnational crime, and so on. A future regionwide community could then be created by combining the frameworks established in each individual functional sector. Any attempt to start with the institutional approach and aim at creating integrated, regionwide frameworks would inevitably give rise to a hornet’s nest of apprehensions and frictions both within and outside the region. Based on a realistic appraisal of current conditions, the functional approach seeks for the present to develop cooperation around various functional aspects, with a view to creating the basic conditions for comprehensive regionwide integration in the future. Adopting this approach will also have another beneficial

effect: it will funnel the dynamism produced by the rapid progress of functional cooperation in these various sectors into the building of a future worldwide community.

The third principle is respect for and realization of universal values such as democracy. As noted above, some East Asian countries are struggling with serious problems—to improve and strengthen governance, including greater democratization, strengthening the rule of law, improving protection of human rights, prevention of corruption, and the enhancement of administrative efficiency. Encouraging East Asian countries to deal with these matters as common worldwide issues will contribute to the development of the region as a whole and, at the same time, serve to secure the understanding of and support for cooperation both inside and outside the region. Reforms are inevitably painful in some respects; countries in the region can assist other countries by sharing their experiences in dealing with these problems.

The fourth principle deals with confidence-building in the area of security, and the facilitation of cooperation in non-traditional security areas. The creation of a region-wide security framework will clearly be a task requiring more time than building economic, social, or cultural frameworks. In contrast to Europe, the security model for East Asia for the time being should not be NATO but a framework more like the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), which was later transformed into the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). As the CSCE/OSCE have sought to do, East Asia must heighten transparency regarding the military capabilities of each country in the region and work to facilitate understanding when there are differences in military policies. Such efforts have already begun at forums like the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). However, East Asia still does not yet have an agreement comparable to the CSCE's Helsinki Final Act, and the region must make greater efforts in ARF and other forums. Moreover, although schemes for regional cooperation in East Asia have begun in non-traditional security sectors such as counter-terrorism, anti-piracy, non-proliferation, and measures against human trafficking, it will be important to promote more effective cooperation in these areas, utilizing existing frameworks like ARF.

Relations with the United States

Finally I would like to address the subject of relations with the United States. The United States is an indispensable partner for East Asia, not least because of the U.S. military presence in its capacity of maintaining peace and security in the region. Under the present conditions when confidence-building among countries in the region still cannot be considered sufficient, there will likely be no change for the foreseeable future in the central position that the Japan–U.S. alliance holds in the region's security system. Moreover, approximately 16 percent of East Asia's trade is with the United States, as against about seven percent for Europe. Thus from the aspect of trade as well, East Asia depends on the United States to a greater degree than does Europe.

Viewpoints vary in the United States regarding any plan for an East Asian community and some express doubt or skepticism. The main points of contention are: (1) Will East Asian regional integration lead to the exclusion of the United States from the region? (2) Will integration lead to the creation of an exclusionary economic zone in East Asia? (3) Will an East Asian community oppose the U.S. agenda of seeking the expansion of freedom, democracy, and human rights in the region? (4) Will a regional community lead to an excessive increase in influence of particular countries in the region?

However, if East Asia can clarify the basic principles and approaches underlying regional cooperation—for example, its open regionalism, functional approach, respect for and realization of universal values like democracy, and promotion of confidence-building measures in the area of security—and can back up its words with appropriate action, it will serve to quell doubts and apprehensions within the United States regarding an East Asian community. One of the reasons I believe a principled integration is so critically important is because of this very point.

Let me also note several additional considerations. First, excluding the United States from the region is not an option for East Asia. East Asia's prosperity, peace, and stability is maintained through its partnership with the United States. The reason East Asia can even consider a concept of a regionwide community is its peace and stability are ensured by the U.S. military presence.

Second, the current process toward integration in East Asia has evolved naturally, based on increasing regional economic interdependence and the global trend toward regional integration. Everyone involved must be constantly on guard against the danger of the process being used for political purposes. A principled integration becomes, therefore, all the more important in that regard, as it serves as a useful instrument in checking political manipulation of the integration process.

Third, the promotion of collaborative efforts by the countries in the region for the common goal of building a regionwide community could play an important role in mitigating regional political and security risks, such as the possibility of nationalism-fueled clashes. As interdependence within the region grows, these kinds of joint efforts will be increasingly important. Any reduction in political and security risks in East Asia, moreover, will also benefit the United States.

East Asia Summit Meeting

The first East Asia Summit will convene in Malaysia in December of this year. The participants will discuss the principles and basic approaches for regional cooperation from a broader strategic perspective, with a view to creating an East Asian community in the future. For that

reason the summit is attracting interest both inside and outside the region. At this East Asia Summit, I hope that the leaders of the East Asian countries will make clear their commitment to pursue a principled integration of the region, and that the meeting will become an historic milestone in the path to peace, prosperity, and progress for East Asia in times to come.

(This is the text of an article by Mr. YAMADA Takio, Director of Regional Policy Division, Asian and Oceanian Affairs Bureau, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which originally appeared in the Fall 2005 issue of the English edition of “GAIKO FORUM.”)