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An East Asian Community and the United States

By ITO Kenichi

Mr. Ralph Cossa, Prof. Tanaka Akihiko, other distinguished panelists and all other participants in the floor, in my capacity as President of the Global Forum of Japan which is the host of this meeting, I welcome you all to this meeting, which is open to the public and intended to widen the forum for public policy debates. Let me report first of all that the panelists who are either to present a paper or to lead discussions today were all engaged in a full-day academic debate yesterday on the same topic of “An East Asian Community and the United States” as today, which was hosted by the Council on East Asian Community. Therefore, it will mean that the presentations and debates that will follow today will be made on the basis of the achievements attained yesterday.

As we look back at the history of the regional integration of “East Asia,” the financial crisis of 1997 played a key role in awakening people of the region to the need of a regional approach to solve the problems they faced. Immediately after the crisis in 1980 the intra-regional trade share was only 34%. But it was as high as 53% in 2003, which compared very well with 45% of NAFTA and 60% of EU in the same year. It cannot be denied that the institutional framework of ASEAN plus Three (APT) has worked well and supported this growth of economic integration. However, the definition of “East Asia” has never been self-evident and subject to redefinition.

The first such occasion to reexamine the membership of “East Asia” came in December 2005 when the first East Asian Summit (EAS) was held in Kuala Lumpur, where, in addition to the 10(ten) APT member countries, Australia, New Zealand and India were also invited. However, the status of those newly invited 3 (three) countries was never clear presumably because it was a reflection of the status of the EAS itself. Originally when the East Asian Vision Group (EAVG) proposed to convene the EAS, the EAS was understood as an upgraded version of the APT and a renaming of “APT” to “East Asia.” But what really happened was not a renaming of “APT” but a redefining of “East Asia.”

I think the question of the relationship between an East Asian Community and the United States is a question both qualitatively and quantitatively different from the membership issue of any other country within or without the region. The reason is because it is a life-and-death issue for an East Asian Community. Its economic prosperity depends on its export to the US market

and its security rests on the guarantee provided by the US. An East Asian Community cannot survive without celebration of the US. Yet the United States is not a country in the region. It cannot be a member of the region for the same reason that Japan cannot be a member of the NAFTA. Personally I think the only way to solve this conundrum is to find some modus operandi which will treat the US with some sort of special status in an East Asian Community.

Now let me also say a few words on the Global Forum of Japan which is the organizer of this “Dialogue.” The Global Forum of Japan is known for its long history of policy-oriented international exchanges dating back to 1982, when Japanese, Americans, Europeans and Canadians met in Washington and established the then so-called Quadrangular Forum. As the Quadrangular Forum was dissolved in 1991 in the wake of the end of the Cold War, it has been active as a national body for policy-oriented international exchanges with Japan as a hub for all countries in the world in the name of the Global Forum of Japan. Every year we organize three to four what we call “Dialogues.” This year we already had one with Taiwan in February and will have another with ASEAN in September.

Welcoming all of you who have participated in this “Dialogue” and hoping a fruitful exchange of views and opinions among you, let me conclude my opening remarks. Thank you again.

(This is the text of an opening speech delivered Prof. ITO Kenichi, President of the Council on East Asian Community, in the “Japan-US-Asia Dialogue: An East Asian Community and the United States” held by the Global Forum of Japan in Tokyo on June 22, 2006)