

December 31, 2010

East Asia Summit featured by the First Participation of U.S. and Russia

By ISHIGAKI Yasuji

The ASEAN Summit and other related meetings were convened in Hanoi on 28-30 October 2010. Among those, the East Asia Summit (EAS) which has been meeting annually since 2005, has, in particular, seen several important developments. I would like to make a few comments on them.

1. The formal decision on the entry of U.S. and Russia to the said Summit as participating states from 2011 on was made. Both countries advanced their participation on a ministerial level in the EAS starting one year ahead as U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov participated fully as special guests of the Chair in this year's EAS.

2. As a result of the above new development, the EAS which has until now been termed as nearly an extra copy of ASEAN+3, with no substantively distinctive character of its own, would increase its importance as an 18 member forum with U.S. and Russia therein. From now on, the EAS would become one of major regional frameworks no less important than the ASEAN+3. "The Hanoi Declaration on the Commemoration of the Fifth Anniversary of the East Asia Summit," which declared "All the participating countries agreed to strengthen the EAS further in the future" was adopted at the Summit.

3. It was observed at the EAS this time that India, Australia and New Zealand, all of whom have hitherto kept low profile in this forum, showed their positive attitude in making contributions on the issues of education, disaster management, etc.

4. Concrete progress was made on several issues such as (1) finance, (2) education, (3) energy, (4) disaster management, and (5) bird flu prevention, all of which have been selected as priority areas to be addressed intensively by the EAS for regional cooperation.

5. As for the relationship between ASEAN+3 and the EAS, it was confirmed that the

former is a main vehicle to build an East Asia Community as a long-term goal, while the latter is “a leaders-led forum for dialogue and cooperation on broad strategic, political and economic issues of common interest and concern with the aim of promoting peace, stability and economic prosperity and integration in East Asia.”

6. As anticipated, the South China Sea question was discussed as an important issue in the ASEAN Summit and other related meetings. In the EAS as well, although it was said that China endeavored in advance for ASEAN countries to refrain from discussing the question in EAS with the assertion that it is an issue to be addressed bilaterally, a number of ASEAN member countries did refer actively to this matter, apparently backed by the U.S. encouragement to the ASEAN member countries to do so. And it was welcomed that the need to work together to make guidelines to enhance the enforcement of the Declaration made by ASEAN and China on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea was agreed upon between China and ASEAN to avoid future conflicts.

Furthermore, it is worth noting that throughout the above process, both U.S. and Russia have manifested a more positive stance toward ASEAN. At Hanoi, Russia held with ASEAN the 2nd Russia-ASEAN Summit with attendance of President Dmitry Medvedev. On the other hand, U.S. had held earlier the 2nd U.S.- ASEAN Summit with attendance of President Barak Obama in September in New York and U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, in her comprehensive policy speech at Honolulu on October 28 had announced the U.S. positive attitude in cooperating with ASEAN and the U.S. policy to put more stress on East Asia.

(This is the English translation of an article written by Mr. ISHIGAKI Yasuji, Delegate for Japan to AALCO and former Professor of Tokai University, as his personal view which originally appeared on the BBS “Hyakka-Somei” of CEAC on November 5, 2010.)