

“We-feeling” of East Asian Countries as Seen in the Wake of the Great Earthquake

By ISHIGAKI Yasuji

It goes without saying that to achieve a full recovery from the extraordinary natural disaster and the nuclear accident, Japan needs international support, in addition to her own efforts in coming months and years over a long-term for rehabilitation and reconstruction. While considerable assistance has been extended by the U.S., based on the Japan-U.S. alliance, we should bear in mind an extensive generous contribution extended to us by all the member countries of ASEAN+3 and the East Asia Summit in accordance with the capacity of the respective countries.

Assistance at times of natural disasters has been called for as one of the pillars of what we call "non-traditional security" cooperation, which is expected to play a significant role in regional cooperation for building an East Asian Community. It should be particularly noted that despite there exist a number of difficult bilateral problems including territorial issues between Japan and East Asian countries, Korea and China sent their rescue teams to Japan immediately after the earthquake and engaged in relief operations respectively in Miyagi and in Iwate. Indonesia, Singapore, India, Australia and New Zealand also dispatched their rescue teams while others provided or proposed assistance in the form of various relief goods and other needed resources. Those countries might have just promptly acted as members of a community as offering helping hands is a natural deed whenever any other member suffers from a great disaster, even when they have some bilateral questions in dispute. Thus, the concerted efforts shown so admirably by all those countries to help Japan could be regarded as deriving out of the sense of regional solidarity or “We-feeling.”

Along with the above-mentioned bilateral activities for rescue and support, notable multilateral operations were also observed. For one thing, it was noted that the consultative mechanism of Japan-China-ROK was functioning well in the midst of a disaster. Amid the moves for cancellation and postponement of several diplomatic events, Japan-China-ROK Trilateral Foreign Ministers' Meeting was convened in Kyoto as previously scheduled on March 19. During that meeting, Foreign Minister MATSUMOTO Takeaki expressed profound gratitude to China and Korea for dispatching disaster rescue teams as well as contributing relief materials. Foreign Ministers of the three countries agreed that they would not only strengthen their cooperation in disaster management and nuclear security, but also accelerate their preparation for Japan's successful holding of the Fourth Japan-China-ROK Trilateral Summit in 2011, to

continue a wide range of Japan-China-ROK cooperation and in early 2011 to establish a permanent secretariat for the trilateral cooperation in Korea.

For another thing, the framework of dialogue between Japan and ASEAN is gradually developing to an action-oriented framework. More specifically, at the urgently convened ASEAN-Japan Ministerial Meeting on April 9 in Jakarta, guidelines for ASEAN's support of Japan's recovery from the Great East Japan Earthquake were declared in the chairman's statement. The guidelines would require the ASEAN Secretariat to play the role of a coordinator in adjusting the relief activities carried out separately by each member country of ASEAN in order to deliver assistance more effectively in accordance with the needs of Japan. Foreign Minister Matsumoto, in appreciation for the support provided by ASEAN countries, expressed his willingness to further strengthen the partnership with ASEAN Secretariat.

It should be added, however, that on another harder note, Japan was strongly urged by Korea and China to provide more quickly information on the radiation concerning the nuclear accident in Fukushima. On the other hand, Russian combat fighters entered the Air Defense Identification Zone of Japan in the aftermath of the disaster and a Chinese airplane attempted an unusually close approach to a Maritime Self-defense Force ship of Japan. All those seem to indicate that the countries involved have not changed their tough attitudes towards Japan as far as the "traditional security" aspect is concerned.

(This is an English translation of the 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 April 13, 2011).