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Rejuvenate EAS as the Asian Version of OSCE

by YAMASHITA Eiji

The U.S. and Russia having joined the East Asia Summit (EAS) in January 2011, the number of EAS member countries has increased from 16 to 18. I would like to discuss what this means.

First, the participation of Russia will mean further loss of the substance of EAS in the sense of a framework for East Asian regional integration. Up until then, the principle had been confirmed in the official documents: the group of the 13 countries of ASEAN Plus Three (APT) was the core framework while the group of the 16 countries of EAS was complementary to APT. Since the idea of promoting Asian regional integration in cooperation with Russia is apparently rather minor among Asian countries, allowing Russia to be an EAS member may be interpreted as a political message to strip EAS of its substance as regional integration. That is to say, "APT, the core itself, is to implement important projects concerning regional integration while EAS, simply nothing but a fringe of APT, is basically not to address important projects concerning regional integration," I suppose. As a matter of fact, EAS of 18 countries would be almost the same structure as Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC).

Second, allowing the U.S. and Russia to be EAS members at the same opportunity might imply to the U.S. such a message as, "You cannot join APT, the core for regional integration." Therefore, hardly anything will be addressed in EAS, which was approved in parallel with APT due to the persistent demand of the Japanese government at its establishment in December 2005. The author has consistently criticized the proposal which the Japanese government propounded at the time of EAS's inauguration, that is, "membership should be extended to Oceania as well," because "this proposal undermines regional solidarity." Though the Japanese government as a whole has taken the side of EAS so far, it should not only recognize its previous political failures in order to drastically change its attitude, but position APT as the focal point in order to seriously pursue Asian integration. Though EAS may handle such issues as FTA and EPA, those issues are anything but the main channels of regional integration, merely promoting free trade, additional encouragement of which would lead to further globalism. In contrast, regional integration is far more like a regional strategy.

Third, participation of the U.S. and Russia has provided EAS with an implication, diverted from its original purpose, as a framework concerning regional security. We should continue to pay attention to this aspect. That is to say, EAS has taken on a meaning like *Hyotan kara Koma* (a Japanese proverb literally meaning a spinning top coming out of a gourd). Because of China's recent hard-line stance in foreign diplomacy, the neighboring countries including Japan are confronting difficult problems in the East China Sea and in the South China Sea, but we see a new possibility for EAS to play its role as a security framework to tackle those problems, that is, to prevent regional conflicts.

In fact, President Obama stated during his visit in Jakarta on November 9 in 2010: "The issues of the South China Sea should be discussed in EAS." On the basis of his statement, the author understands that a possibility has arisen for EAS to be an Asian version of Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), which comprises 56 member countries including the U.S, Russia and Canada. It was previously said, "If the six-party talks involving North Korea meet with success, it is possible for the talks to become a framework for regional security in East Asia." However, EAS is now expected to play the role instead. That is to say, EAS, while supposed to be losing most of its significance as a base of regional economic integration, suddenly assumed a new meaning as a framework of diplomacy and security for preventing regional conflicts.

Should this be realized, EAS, though not being regional integration itself, will provide an important infrastructure for promoting Asian regional integration. Nevertheless, I have no idea what will be covered by Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA), which was established on the basis of EAS and under the theme of East Asian economic integration. This is because, as stated earlier, there seems almost nothing for EAS to do concerning regional integration and, in particular, economic integration. Though the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) is appreciated for its endeavors to realize "the Nikai-Initiative," membership of ERIA should have been granted to the 13 countries of APT, not to the 16 countries of then EAS. I have been insisting from the beginning, "It could not be better for ERIA to have been established on the basis of APT."

It was the responsibility of the whole Japanese government for METI having founded ERIA on the basis of EAS, given that the Japanese government as a whole including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had adopted such diplomatic policies. I previously pointed out the possibility for EAS to expand its membership (including superpowers) in the near future. My view was that Asian countries except for Japan were hoping to make EAS superficial. Apparently, the Japanese government misread the future way of Asian regional integration. On the other hand, regional integration in finance is making a relatively steady progress through the

framework of APT Finance Ministers' Meeting, an example of which is the secretariat of the Chiang Mai Initiative Multilateralisation (CMIM) recently established in Singapore (the APT Macroeconomic Research Office, AMRO). We must not forget that APT is the main channel of Asian regional integration. On this occasion, the Japanese government as a whole should make drastic policy changes to position APT in the center of Asian regional integration.

(This is the English translation of an article written by Dr. YAMASHITA Eiji, Professor Emeritus of Osaka City University, which originally appeared on the BBS “Hyakka-Somei” of CEAC on June 5 and 6, 2011.)