

The 26th Policy Plenary Meeting on “China's Stance towards an East Asian Community”

May 21, 2008

The 26th Policy Plenary Meeting of the Council on East Asian Community (CEAC) was held on May 21 at the conference room of the Japan Forum on International Relations (JFIR) to discuss “China’s Stance towards an East Asian Community.” Prof. AMAKO Satoshi, Member of CEAC and Professor of Waseda University, made a keynote report, which was followed by an active exchange of views among Members of CEAC.

Prof. AMAKO stated, "We can analyze how China is perceiving the concept of an East Asian Community from three perspectives entertained by Chinese scholars. The first perspective is given by those scholars who pay attention to power transitions in the international order and the second by those who discuss characteristics of different concepts of an East Asian Community, while the third by those who are more interested in the fundamental nature of the international order.

(1) The first perspective of power transitions in the international order is based on the idea of “China’s Peaceful Rise to Great-Power Status”. There is an argument that no big country in the region should treat medium/small countries in the region as its spheres of influence and that China should play a leading role in the promotion of regional economic cooperation to contribute to a harmonious community building in the region. Such arguments on an East Asian Community building have converged with an argument that a community building in East Asia must have a desirable relationship with US, which could be similar to that between EU and US.

(2) The second perspective of characteristics of different concepts of an East Asian Community pays special attention to arguments developed in Japan on an East Asian Community building. While some scholars emphasized the importance of reconciliation and cooperation between Japan and China as a basis for the community building in the region even quoting the importance of the same between France and Germany in the

European experience, others showed their wariness towards Japan's alledged ambition to become a political big power in the region through the process of community building. Japan's alledged insistence to bring US into an East Asian Community is quoted as an example of the bases on which they conclude so.

(3) The third perspective of the fundamental nature of the international order, while recognizing that an East Asian Community order in the 21st century could be the revival of neither a Chinese Central-Kingdom Order nor a Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, argues that we should build an "Asian Common House." Although this argument should be aimed at the creation of new "Asian Consciousness" on the basis of equality and reciprocity among different peoples, races, and cultures, we can not deny that Chinese orientation is to attempt to build the Consciousness on the basis of the Chinese identity."

Prof. ITO Kenichi, President of CEAC, commented, "It seems that the process of an East Asian community building has entered its second stage. The first stage was a process during which ASEAN played a leading role and Japan and China just followed. However, since the visit of former Prime Minister ABE Shinzo to China in 2006, the Japan-China relationship has drastically improved. And it has finally become possible for the two leaders to discuss directly perspectives of not only the bilateral but the regional problems as well. Being reminded that the driving force of the European integration was the cooperation of France and Germany, I would like to emphasize the importance of the advent of the second stage in the community building in East Asia." In response to the above report and comment, 15 member of CEAC joined an active exchange of views on the topic.