

The 35th Policy Plenary Meeting on “The Recent Development and Future Challenges in the Regional Cooperation in Politics and Security”

October 28, 2009

The 35th Policy Plenary Meeting of the Council on East Asian Community (CEAC) was held on October 28 at the conference room of the Japan Forum on International Relations, to discuss "The Recent Development and Future Challenges in the Regional Cooperation in Politics and Security." Dr. FUKUSHIMA Akiko, a member of CEAC and Senior Fellow of the Japan Foundation, made keynote report, which was followed by an active exchange of views among members of CEAC. Dr. FUKUSHIMA stated as follows:

Discussion on East Asia community building in politico-security field had lost its steam after the first East Asia Summit. This does not reflect the interest lost in the concept. Rather, instead of debating the concept of a community, East Asian countries have promoted actual functional cooperation on trade, finance and non-traditional security challenges including pandemic, disaster relief, environmental protection, and food security.

When Prime Minister Hatoyama immediately after taking office in September 2009 proposed an East Asian community (EAc) based on his concept of Yuai, fraternity at the UN General Assembly and subsequent bilateral and multilateral meetings, this proposal prompted active debate on regional architectures in Asia. His vision of an East Asia community seems to be in the making at the time of this writing but the basic tone of his speech was the promotion of functional cooperation including security agenda which is in accord with the policy recommendations presented by CEAC in its Policy Report in 2005.

While Japan was perceived as not forthcoming in leading regionalism or at best is leading from behind due to its history problem, Prime Minister Hatoyama faced the history problem squarely in his speeches and was straightforward in proposing an East Asia

community. His speeches have certainly removed the criticism on Japan's lack of initiative in East Asia regionalism.

Meanwhile, in the past two decades after the Cold War, Asia which was known to be void of regional architectures is now crowded with numerous regional architectures for politico-security cooperation, such as ASEAN plus frameworks including ASEAN+3, East Asia Summit, ASEAN Regional Forum, ADMM as well as APEC, and new trilateral frameworks such as Japan-China-Korea. And yet proposals for new architectures do not cease. Most prominently Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd has proposed an Asia-Pacific community (APc) as a single institution to cover both economy and security.

The challenges of the regional cooperation in East Asia in political and security areas are how to overcome the differences in political and security regimes and values. The most prominent architecture of regional cooperation for traditional security is a web of bilateral alliances with the United States. Some of them are forming trilateral framework such as Japan-Australia-US and Japan-China-Korea. On top of these, there are mechanisms for broader security cooperation at track one and two levels. One of such framework is ARF, which is evolving its function of confidence-building. Other regional frameworks such as ASEAN+3, East Asia Summit and APEC, as well as track 2 process such as Shangri-La provide venue for security dialogue. Under these frameworks substantial functional cooperation is underway, more than commonly perceived.

ASEAN who has been a convening power in East Asia regionalism faces a question of geographical footprint of regional architectures whether it should be East Asia or Asia Pacific. With ASEAN Charter, ASEAN is moving towards a new phase of their regionalism with a plan to create politico-security, economy and cultural communities. ASEAN welcomes the U.S. engagement in Asia, with the U.S. signing on TAC and its policy shift toward Myanmar. Meanwhile US which also hosts APEC Leaders Meeting in 2011 emphasizes the role of APEC as an architecture for regional cooperation in wider Asia-Pacific which also covers human security challenges such as food safety. With the renewed interests on Asia by the United States and aforementioned proposals for EAc and APc, ASEAN is now exploring ways to make sure that they can keep their drivers' seat for regionalism.

To conclude, as far as regional cooperation in politics and security in East Asia is concerned, it is necessary to leverage not only bilateral frameworks, but also multilateral

frameworks. Rather than choosing or creating a comprehensive architecture for cooperation at this point of time, we should let existing multilayered frameworks for regional cooperation to grow and to let the ones most effective to survive. Survival of the fittest. Especially, it is important to maintain cooperative relations in the area of non-traditional security. Regional cooperation in Asia is certainly led by economic activities, most notably by FTAs and EPAs. In order to make such cooperation sustainable, it is equally important to promote politico-security cooperation. Traditional security would require the current web of bilateral alliances, while non-traditional security issues would require transnational cooperation to ably cope with challenges. Multilateral architectures in Asia when combined with bilateral layer of cooperation would work as a stabilizer of the region.

Japan should strive to establish cooperative ties on a regional level as well as bilateral ties though difficult a task as it is, there would be stabilizing effects as it could have broadened diplomatic choices in the political and security areas. In addition to the outcome, a process towards community building in politico-security counts. It can turn antipathy to empathy.

In response to the above reports, 18 members of CEAC joined in an active exchange of views on the topic.