

The 40th Policy Plenary Meeting on “The Beginning of a New Chapter towards the Establishment of an ASEAN community”

May 20, 2010

The 40th Policy Plenary Meeting of the Council on East Asian Community (CEAC) was held on May 20th at the conference room of Japan Forum on International Relations, to discuss "The Beginning of a New Chapter towards the Establishment of an ASEAN community". Amb. KATORI Yoshinori, Director-General of the Foreign Service Training Institute and former Ambassador for ASEAN, made a keynote report, which was followed by active exchanges of views among members of the CEAC. The gist of his keynote report is as follows.

1. A New milestone in the integration process

Important progress towards building an ASEAN community could be observed during my tenure as Japan's first Ambassador for ASEAN from October 2008 to March 2010: (1) The ASEAN Charter entered into force in December 2008. ASEAN has acquired legal status and further strengthened its institutions. (2) The Committee of Permanent Representatives (rank of Ambassador) based in Jakarta started its activities in May 2009. In order to maintain close contacts with the ASEAN Secretariat as well as the CPR, currently, 33 non-ASEAN countries have appointed Ambassadors for ASEAN. As for Japan, it has stationed its Ambassador for ASEAN in Jakarta since April of this year. (3) ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) has been realized in January this year. (4) The ASEAN agreement on disaster management and emergency response entered into force last December. (5) The ASEAN flag as well as the ASEAN anthem launched officially by the ASEAN Charter will contribute in further strengthening ASEAN identity.

2. Growing importance of East Asian economy

ASEAN is not only recovering from the financial crisis caused by the Lehman shock in 2008, but also further consolidating its economic and financial bases. (1) In March of this year, the Chiang Mai Initiative Multilateralization (CMIM) Agreement came into effect. (2) The middle class in East Asia including ASEAN continues to grow. (3) Infrastructure

demand throughout the region is expected to skyrocket in coming years. (4) ASEAN concluded FTA agreements with all the "plus 6" countries and paved the way for stronger economic interaction with these countries. In light of the growing economic importance of the region, US, EU as well as Russia are strengthening their engagement with ASEAN. ASEAN China economic relations are rapidly developing especially in the Mekong region which borders the Yunnan and Guangxi Autonomous Region.

3. ASEAN's priorities

As for ASEAN's priorities, (1) ASEAN attaches great importance in enhancing connectivity within ASEAN. "Central to the promotion of ASEAN connectivity is the development of physical infrastructure, of multimodal transportation and ICT linkages and of supporting legal infrastructure and other necessary software". Emphasis is put also on "connecting of the hearts and minds of ASEAN peoples across the region." (Statements of the 15th ASEAN summit). Also, ASEAN attaches great importance in (2) Developing Asian Bond Market as well as stimulating demand within ASEAN, (3) Maintaining ASEAN centrality in an emerging regional architecture, and (4) Strengthening confidence building measures. In this last point, on top of the important role of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), the initiative of ADMM plus 8 (meeting of defense ministers of ASEAN countries plus Japan, China, Korea, India, Australia, NZ, USA and Russia) will contribute in further strengthening the confidence building in this region. (5) Also, in pursuit of active engagement of ASEAN on global issues, ASEAN attaches great importance for the representation of the ASEAN chair in the G20 meeting.

4. Enhancing Japan ASEAN relations

Japan and ASEAN have developed strong economic interdependence throughout the years. It is important for Japan to continue to expand the economic interaction with ASEAN. In addition, in order to provide new stimuli in our relations, Japan should emphasize concrete areas which can serve as symbols of cooperation. In my view, one possible area would be increased exchanges of people between Japan and ASEAN. For example, Japan could take measures to receive the caretakers and nurses from the ASEAN countries in a smoother and more practical way. To study the possibility for increased reception of skilled labor from ASEAN would also be useful. Academic and student exchange should be promoted too. Furthermore, environment protection as well as science and technology are certainly promising areas of cooperation. Finally, Japan should continue to take into account the global aspect of international relations. For example, solid Japan-US relations will have a positive impact on Japan ASEAN relations and vice versa. In

the same context, Japan should continue its effort to further deepen the relations with Korea, China, EU and all other important partners.

In response to the above reports, 16 members of CEAC joined in an active exchange of views on the topic.