

The relationship between Japan and the EU

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Abstract

Japan has a good relationship with the European Union through many channels. The EU donates two times more for ODA than what the USA does. Regarding the GNP, the EU's GNP is almost as big as the USA. The EU is representative almost as an additional member at the G7. It has proven that even small and middle-sized countries, when united, can play an impressive role for international politics. Flow of refugees and migrants into the EU makes the political situation in the EU unstable. Brexit will weaken further the EU. That has a negative impact on Japan. If Japan cooperates with the EU, Japan can contribute much more for peace and security for the world. This is possible because Japan and the EU with soft power have won trust and respect in the world community. To make this world more peaceful is the best way to curb nationalism and populism at home. For better understanding the important role of the Japan and the EU relationship, one needs only to imagine how this world would be if there is neither Japan nor the EU and if only America, China and Russia determine everything.

Keywords

Japan-EU relationship, Brexit, Migration, Security, Cooperation with the EU

1. Japan-EU relationship

Japan and the EU are developed countries with mature democracy and social market economy. They have good reason to intensify relationship each other. The EU has had its office in 1974 in Tokyo. In 1987 Japan and the EU have established the EU-Japan Centre for Industrial Cooperation to solve economic frictions and problems to facilitate industrial cooperation and investment.

In the first stage, the dominant issue between Japan and the EU was trade problems. The relationship becomes more and more multilateral, full-fledged and good-balanced. Since 1991 the Japan-EU Summit is annually held. In 2001 Japan and the EU concluded the Strategic Partnership. In course of time the fields of cooperation are further expanded. 'EU-Japan relations have since 2009 entered a new phase to attempt reversing course by promoting not only economic relations but also political security, intellectual and social link' [Prade, 2014].

Such cooperation is possible because both have the same value, the same political notion and the same interests. To achieve optimally the purpose, they intensify relationship and exchange information through the regular Japan-EU Summits and Japan-EU Ministerial Meetings. Japan and the EU hold regularly meeting on finance and economic strategy. There is also regular discussion on structural reform. Japan and the EU meet together to conclude the Free Trade Agreement (FTA).

Regarding the FTA, Japan has a good reason to accelerate the negotiation with the EU. The Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) cannot be realized soon because President-elect Donald Trump will allegedly withdraw from the TPP negotiation on his first day in office in January 2017. The Japanese government ratified the TPP in the quick process on the Dec. 9, 2016 and hopes that this decision will give a pressure on Trump and change his mind. If Japan has ratified the FTA with Europe,

America's export to Japan will be handicapped. The Japanese government expects that the USA will return to the negotiation table. Whether it becomes so as desired, remains still to be seen.

Beside the TPP there is also the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). Japan will not participate at the moment in the RCEP for which China since 2005 propagates. The RCEP is the FTA among 10 ASEAN nations plus China, India, Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand. The reason for Japanese reluctant behavior to the RCEP is that the USA is not included in the RCEP, and that it might damage the Japan-America relationship, if Japan signs the treaty before the TPP. However if there is no chance to realize the TPP, the RCEP is an alternative option.

The FTA between Japan and the EU brings benefits for the both but also for the world economy. It can send a message for free trade and against the prevailing protectionism. 'Europe and Japan were increasingly aware that a closer partnership between these large economies and like-minded, mature democracies would benefit not only each other, but the world as a whole.'⁽¹⁾ Japan and the EU, as trustworthy partners, work



Figure 1: A star on the EU flag doesn't represent a nation. The EU exists from 28 countries. If it is so, there must be 28 stars. Twelve stars symbolize perfection and unification. The EU flag needs therefore not to be changed even after Brexit.

closely in the international arena at the G 7, at the G 20 and also at the UN. The EU attends quasi as the 8th member the G 7 Summit. At the last G 7 Summit held on May 26-27, 2017 in Ise-Shima for example, the EU has attended all meetings in Japan according to the remark of EU-ambassador in Tokyo at the general meeting of the EU-Associations held on Dec. 16, 2016. I was at the meeting as president of Ishikawa EU-Association.

To understand the important role of the Japan and the EU relationship, one needs only to imagine how this world would be if there is neither Japan nor the EU and if only America, China and Russia determine everything in the world with their overwhelming military, economic and geopolitical power and isolationism.

2. Brexit, populism and the weakened EU

The UNHCR estimates on the June 20, 2016 that in 2016 the number of refugees in the world will amount to 65,300,000⁽²⁾. Many people from war-torn regions and countries seek for asylum to Europe, America, Australia, Canada and so forth. But the dominant part of those people leaving their towns stays at their national border or in the neighboring countries. Some part of them is successful to reach developed countries. However, the issue of migration excites uneasiness and political discussion in the host countries. Pictures and sensational video footages of flowing immigrants into Europe frighten population in the EU and stir severe political discussion. There are demonstrations of supporters and opponents on the street.

With the proceeding consolidation of the EU, a member state is losing its national sovereignty. The Treaty of Lisbon enacted in 2009, accelerates further this process. Some people feel national feelings harmed. As far as single currency and single market system bring more merits than demerits, such opinion is minority. Migration issue encourages people who will question the framework of the EU. In the overstrained EU the populist-parties which will not accept migrants, have gained popularity, favored by media reports on overflowing migrants and also on crimes and Islamic terror attacks committed by migrants and people with migration background. Populists resort to nationalism and cultural identity. They insist that most asylum seekers are in fact people who want only better life and better job. The political parties of nationalism and populism increased in influence in the EU. UKIP (UK Independence Party, Nigel Farage) in England, FN (Front National) in France, AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) in Germany, FPÖ (Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs) in Austria, and M5S (Movimento 5 Stelle) in Italy to name a few. The list of the countries which will not accept the allocated number of migrants by the EU is long: England, Poland, Finland, Austria and so forth. They insist that those problems can be solved if they step down from the EU and get back the sovereignty.

East European countries belong also to the list of wannabe withdrawers. Free market and free flow of capital have not only positive but also negative impact on the economics in those countries. The competition within the EU is for those

countries hard enough so that there is no room for accepting refugees. Young workers in the East-Europe see any hope more to survive in own countries where the unemployment rate is so high. They leave so their home towns and will settle down in the West Europe. There is no wonder that some countries in the East-Europe have a strong nostalgia to the past communism era. Bulgaria's new president Rumen Radev has established a good relationship with Moscow. All those movements weaken without doubt the political and economic position of the EU.

Single market and single currency are important pillars of the EU. Germany for example received the most profits from this system. Free trade and globalization of economics have positive and negative impact on workers in the developed countries. Many companies with high wage become in fierce competition unprofitable and are forced to shift their production sites to foreign countries with lower wage if they don't want to go into bankruptcy. Double-digit unemployment rate is not unusual in some regions in the EU. The gulf between wealth and poverty goes on widening in the developed countries. Job-less people and workers with low income consider that foreign workers are their rivals. So they will not accept migrants and asylum-seekers. They yield to populism and nationalism.

Opinions towards refugees are divided among population. Some people think that own cultural identity is endangered and that most refugees are not true refugees but seek only for better jobs and higher income. The others think that rich countries have a special obligation to protect them from humanitarian reasons. In reality it is difficult to distinguish between migrants and refugees. Dividing line between migrants and refugees is blur and fluid. If refugees must stay longer in a host country, they need education and training to work and they must earn their living costs. No country can afford to feed them with tax money for longer time. They are gradually integrated in the society and decide to settle down there.

3. Migration issue is closely related with Japan

Japanese news media report on the migration problem in Europe as if it has nothing to do with Japan. Such behavior should be criticized from various viewpoints. Japan has acknowledged the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees in 1981 so that it has obligation to accept refugees. In reality it is regarded as a very restrictive country to accept refugees. Japanese society is not sustainable without immigrants facing aging population with decreasing birthrate. Japan needs foreign workers for industry, fishery, agriculture, welfare, nursing care and so forth. If it is so, then it had better to give them chance for education and training so that they can be integrated in Japan.

Decreasing birthrate is a common phenomenon for almost all industrialized countries. China with its one-child policy is rather exception. Those nations need young and competent workers from other countries. Japan must change its islander mentality. It should not fail to take this only one and last chance to invite migrants because Japanese economic position in the world is gradually sinking. It has however taken close-

door immigration policies and acknowledged only tiny percent of asylum-seekers as refugees. Officially it will accept only skilled laborers but in fact Japanese companies need unskilled workers with cheap wage. Japanese government has instead invented many legal loopholes.

One loophole is the foreigner status of Japanese descent. They can stay in Japan and work without any complications. Persons of Japanese descent mainly from South America are appointed as temporary employee in automobile industries, construction sites and so forth. Another loophole is the trainee system launched in 1973. Through the training on job, foreign workers can learn allegedly advanced Japanese technology and after return to home, they can transfer the skill to their home countries. Japan insists that this trainee system can contribute to development of developing countries, but in fact they are regarded and treated as cheap workers without meaningful training. This kind of status of foreign workers could be “violation of human rights” [Yamazaki et al., 2000]. They live without sufficient language training so that it is difficult for them to be integrated in the Japanese community as full-members. They are expected to stay only temporally in Japan.

Akashi points out the defect of the system as following: “The legal system would need to be revised in a way that reflects their acknowledgments as full members of the Japanese society” [Akashi, 2014]. For the integration of foreign workers in Japan it is necessary to change this deep-rooted myth of the uniqueness of Japan as a homogenous society. Japan has in fact cooperated with the EU regarding migration problem but the financial contribution alone which Japan made, is not enough to solve migration problems in the world. Japan should open its national border and take some part of burdens from the EU. The weakened EU caused by the migration problem is not beneficial for Japan if we think of Japanese security as mentioned below.

4. Security

Brexit has a huge impact not only on Japan but also on the rest of the world. The world situation is now in flux. The future of Japanese entrepreneurs which invested in the UK becomes unpredictable in the case of Brexit because they must pay tariffs if their goods are exported into other countries within the EU. But the impact of Brexit not limited on economics. In regards to population number, GNP and security, England's share within the EU is too big to fail. The presence of the UK in the EU has played a role of deterrence to prevent conflicts from outside, partly because the UK has a permanent seat on the U.N. Security Council with nuclear arsenal and partly because England has a special relationship with the US.

Fundamental ideas of the EU are based on the common ground like freedom, democracy, rule of law and respect for human rights as declared in the second article of the Treaty on European Union enacted on Feb. 7, 2002⁽³⁾. The EU is therefore especially critical towards Russia's unlawful annexation of Crimea and the East-Ukraine's civil war, de fact caused by

Russia. Japan supported the standpoint of the EU and applied economic sanctions against Russia together with the EU and the international community. The EU has huge political power as far as united in the EU. The Kingdom's withdrawal from the EU would weaken the EU's political power. “So, what's bad for the European Union is good for Russia”, said Prof Sergei Medvedev from Moscow's Higher School of Economics⁽⁴⁾. The weakened EU is also beneficial for Beijing. The EU and China are economically closed involved and mutually dependant but as far as China will not and can't accept the above mentioned fundamental principle of the EU, there are some restrains in the economic and political relationship. The weakening EU may not be able to afford harsh critique and measure towards China and Russia. What is bad for the EU is also bad for Japan. China may then have much more free hand in South China Sea. China claims nine-dash line called “the cow's tongue”. According to the report of News 24, published on May 17, 2015, “China's relationship with the US is “stable” despite tensions in the South China Sea, President Xi Jinping told top American diplomat John Kerry Sunday, adding that the Pacific Ocean is “vast enough” for both powers, state media said.”⁽⁵⁾ If such thing happens, Japan will be isolated and encircled by China and Russia. Japan needs in this sense a politically stable Europe.

5. Cooperation with the EU

The referendum in England and Brexit is a wake-up call for Europe, as Natalie Nougayrède writes in her op-ed “Brexit is a wake-up call: save Europe”⁽⁶⁾ in the guardian published on June 25, 2016. Brussels has learned lesson from Brexit and tries to make more effort to unite the EU to avoid another candidate who will withdraw from the EU. It will invest more for the economically weak regions within Europe to raise living standards, to develop infrastructure and to eliminate unemployment in order that population becomes satisfied with the EU. The citizens in the EU should have more opportunity to understand positive role of the EU for Europe and the rest of the world so that they cannot be easily manipulated by populism and nationalism. Technocrats in Brussels are too idealistic that ordinal people can follow them. Slowing down of the integration process of the EU may be a necessary step if it is necessary.

The EU should engage more in the unstable and war-torn countries in Africa and in the Near East in order to solve political conflicts and to create jobs so that inflow of migrants into the EU can be curved. It is necessary to accelerate conciliation there. Political stability and prosperity and creation of jobs in those regions are the best way to stop youth's fascination for extremism. Japanese proverb says: Compassion is not for other people's benefit (Nasake wa Hitono tamenarazu). The real meaning of this proverb is: He who gives to another bestows on himself. To help others and to create stability in the world is beneficial also for donators. EU will be revived as a stronger community even after Brexit.

I worry rather about the future of Japan and its international

position. According to the list of the ODA published by the OECD on April 13, 2016, the biggest contributor is the European Union. It gives \$87.64 billion. This amount is the sum of the donation from the EU institution and the EU member countries. It is followed with great difference by the USA (\$31.08 billion), the UK (\$18.70 billion), Germany (\$17.78 billion), Japan (\$9.32 billion), France (\$9.23 billion) and Sweden (\$7.09 billion), Netherlands (\$5.81 billion) and so forth⁽⁷⁾. I would conclude from the statistics that Japan should donate more for peace and security in the world in spite of financially and fiscally difficult time.

Japan cannot alone accomplish many things. It must work together with another partner. Which nation or region is suitable as a partner for Japan? Is it America or China or Russia? My answer is the EU. Japan and the EU have advanced technology, financial and human resources. Japan and the EU are soft powers which have won trust and respect in the world. Many European countries included Japan have enjoyed as the Reputation Institution annually reports⁽⁸⁾. A country needs good reputation, trust and respect for international politics, international business, international tourism, peace-building, humanitarian activities, recruiting highly-skilled workers and researchers from the world and so forth. A nation which has soft power needs neither to use military power, nor to coerce others to follow its will. Soft power is “the ability to produce outcomes through persuasion and attraction rather than coercion or payment” [Nye, 2012]. A nation with soft power has a special position to be able to send message to the world community for peace and prosperity. If we think of the current situation in Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria, an intervention in those regions by using soft power in the early stage of conflicts would have been a good option. Political stability in the world can stop the flow of migrants and curb nationalism and extremism. The repeated terrorist attacks in Europe, in Turkey in the Middle East and so forth are the results of failing foreign policies and interventions. My prescription is to intensify the cooperation between Japan and the EU.

Notes

- ⁽¹⁾ <http://www.euinjapan.jp/en/relations/political/>.
- ⁽²⁾ <http://www.unhcr.org/news/latest/2016/6/5763b65a4/global-forced-displacement-hits-record-high.html>.
- ⁽³⁾ The Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities.
- ⁽⁴⁾ <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-eu-referendum-36461020>, published on 7 June 2016.
- ⁽⁵⁾ <http://www.news24.com/World/News/Xi-Pacific-Ocean-is-big-enough-for-China-US-20150517>.
- ⁽⁶⁾ <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/jun/25/brexit-vote-wake-up-call-save-europe>.
- ⁽⁷⁾ <http://www.oecd.org/dac/stats/ODA-2015-detailed-summary.pdf>.

- ⁽⁸⁾ <http://www.forbes.com/pictures/eilh45ehmfi/the-worlds-most-reputab/#52fe55a526f5>.

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