

Statement by Amb. MASAKI Yasushi CEPS

(Webinar on “A global EU Connectivity Strategy as an extension of
EU-Asia relations?” / 09:00-10:30, 21 April, 2021)

1. Introduction

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to be among such prestigious panelists.

Last week, I attended the Foreign Affairs Committee of the European Parliament. There, I was grilled by none other than the honorable Reinhard Butikofer. He told me “it is high time we put wheels on the cart!” I completely agree.

By “cart”, he was referring to the “Japan-EU Partnership on Sustainable Connectivity and Quality Infrastructure”. The document was signed in Brussels by Prime Minister Abe and

Commission President Juncker back in 2019.

This is an ambitious document. Let me quote Prime Minister Abe who spoke at the first Europa connectivity forum, where the document was signed.

“Our EPA made Japan and the EU flag bearers of free trade, while our SPA made us the guardians of universal values.

With the two of them in balanced combination, if the world were a ship sailing the open seas, these two agreements would serve as a stabilizer to counteract even the most severe pitching and rolling.

The fact that the pledge of a “connectivity partnership” between the EU and Japan has taken shape is nothing less than the concrete representation of that stabilizing function.”

End of quote.

2. Urgency

The operationalization of this partnership, and all other connectivity partnerships of like-minded partners, is indeed urgent.

Why?

My take is that the answer lies in the urgency to defend the established rule-based international order. Today, this prerequisite for sustainable growth is facing unprecedented attacks. This can be seen in the South China Sea, the East China Sea, and in the rising tensions on the Ukrainian border.

This makes the enhancement of the resilience of the world's economies absolutely urgent, enabling them to withstand ongoing disruptions to the rule-based order. Hence connectivity. Connectivity increases resilience. We need to be able to present credible options for connectivity projects that

truly enhance the resilience of our respective economies and regions. NOT the other way round.

This is a huge task, not only in terms of volume, but also in terms of the range and the level of expertise required. This is only possible by mobilizing resources and expertise from like-minded countries, international organizations, and the private sector.

3. Forging Inclusive Partnerships

Japan and the EU are well placed to lead this task.

Why? Let me give you three reasons.

First, we already have a joint commitment at the highest political level. As I mentioned earlier, the joint document signed by our leaders in 2019 confirmed our shared commitment to pursue sustainable growth by developing

transparent, open, inclusive and sustainable connectivity. This did not come from nowhere. It is firmly rooted in the decades-long partnership between Japan and the EU and our shared values, as reflected in our Strategic Partnership Agreement and the Economic Partnership Agreement. The strength of this partnership is also manifest in the EU strategy of cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, released this past Monday. Japan is particularly encouraged by the emphasis that the document puts on the rule of law and the rules-based international order in the Indo-Pacific as the foundation of the EU's engagement in the region.

(CONNECTIVITY MAP :SHOWN ON THE SCREEN)

Second, we have a head start to deliver tangible results. After World War II, from being a recipient of foreign assistance, Japan emerged as one of the major industrialized economies, together with the vibrant Indo-Pacific region. This was only possible because we jointly worked with our neighbors to enhance connectivity. To date, this joint work continues in the

Indo-Pacific and beyond. Japan and the EU are both omnipresent, in many cases playing complementary roles and finding synergy. Both Japan and the EU are Development Partners of the Mekong River Commission. Both support the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on Disaster Management. Both support maritime resource management in the Pacific region. Both support the Nacala Corridor in Mozambique, the Burkina Faso-Niger Corridor, the West Africa Growth Ring Corridor and the Northern Corridor in Uganda. Both support the border management between Afghanistan and Tajikistan. Such solid foundations are enabling Japan and the EU to advance swiftly in our work to identify possible joint projects. We are lucky to have an extremely capable counterpart in Ambassador Vlahutin. We are on a good path.

(CONNECTIVITY MAP : END TO BE SHOWM)

Third, we are both good at forging inclusive partnerships. Under Japan's G20 presidency in 2019, Japan and the EU

managed to have both the US and China on board for the “G20 Principles for Quality Infrastructure Investment” to be endorsed by the group. Likewise, the concept of “Data Free Flow with Trust” was endorsed during the same meeting.

Thus, Japan and the EU are well placed to lead and to have key like-minded partners on board.

ASEAN is key. The ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific, or the AOIP, agreed by their leaders in 2019, should be at the core of any international partnership for connectivity in the region. This is at the heart of the 2019 Japan-ASEAN joint communique on connectivity. The QUAD leaders agreed on the centrality of the AOIP last month as well. It also underpins the connectivity partnership between the EU and ASEAN.

India and South Asia are also essential partners. We have high hopes that the connectivity partnership between the EU and India will be agreed next month in Porto.

To have the U.S. on board is crucial. Last week, Prime Minister Suga and US President Biden agreed to work closely together on green and digital connectivity in the Indo-Pacific and beyond. The agreed steps include new initiatives such as the Global Digital Connectivity Partnership and the Japan-US Clean Energy Partnership, cooperation on sensitive supply chains such as those for semi-conductors, the development of adequate pandemic response surge capacity, and climate- and environment-friendly infrastructure for our regional partners.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, forging inclusive partnerships in order to maximize complementarity and synergy is absolutely necessary. This is where a discussion such as the one we are having today can have added value.

I look forward to today's discussion.

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