

Statement by Amb. MASAKI Yasushi at AFET 4/13

1. Introduction

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Honorable Chairs,

Honorable members of the Committee on Foreign Affairs,

Honorable members of the Delegation for Relations with Japan,

It is a great honor for me to have this opportunity to discuss with you the challenges and opportunities of the Strategic Partnership between Japan and the EU.

The Japan-EU Strategic Partnership Agreement, the SPA, along with

the Economic Partnership Agreement, the EPA, has entered its 3rd year in operation. In the meantime, our partnership has gone from strength to strength. The EPA has yielded tangible results for businesses on both sides. Japan and the EU, as like-minded partners sharing values and principles, are joining forces on a number of strategically important challenges, including the green and digital transitions, as well as global health.

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Out of the long to-do-list of our partnership, I would like to focus today on the aspects that this very committee has recently highlighted. The recent Common Foreign and Security Policy annual report mentions

Japan as one of the EU's main partners for its future Indo-Pacific policy. Likewise, the recent Connectivity Report emphasizes the importance of the EU's partnership with Japan.

We fully share these views. Now, let me elaborate.

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2. Japan's vision for a Free and Open Indo-Pacific

Honorable Chairs and Members,

Back in 2016, the then Japanese Prime Minister ABE Shinzo put forward for the first time Japan's vision for a Free and Open Indo

Pacific. The concept has since been endorsed by regional partners, including the ASEAN, India, Australia, and the US. Recently, we have seen in Europe a surge of interest in the Indo-Pacific. France, Germany and the Netherlands published their respective Indo-Pacific policies, which indicate that they are on the same page as Japan. The EU is also currently working on its own Indo-Pacific policy. These initiatives are all absolutely welcome.

This January, Foreign Minister Motegi of Japan virtually attended the EU Foreign Affairs Council. There, he explained to his counterparts our idea of how Japan and the EU can cooperate in the Indo-Pacific. The response was overwhelmingly positive.

Japan's idea can be summarized in 3 sentences.

A. Sustainable growth in the Indo-Pacific is vital for the entire world.

B. This, however, is only possible in a permissive international environment, where the established rule-based order is upheld.

C. For the free, open and rule-based international order to be upheld in the Indo-Pacific, inclusive partnerships of like-minded players are necessary.

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There are reasons for optimism. Despite the growing tensions in the region, the Indo-Pacific is full of pro-active partnerships and regional

initiatives to shape the region for the better, as exemplified by the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific, or the AOIP. A strong support for the AOIP was expressed during the recent leaders' conference of the so-called "QUAD", comprising Japan, Australia, India and the U.S., which aims to promote a free, open and rule-based international order in the Indo-Pacific. Multilateral rule-based frameworks are emerging in the region. The CPTPP stipulates modern rules of the highest standard. An ASEAN-led initiative to develop an inclusive rule-based free trade area bore fruits in the form of the RCEP. This is quite an achievement considering the diversity of the region, with economic superpowers on the one hand, and small and least developed economies on the other.

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3. Challenges to the rule-based international order in the Indo-Pacific

Honorable Chairs and Members,

Regrettably, there are also reasons for concern. The rule-based international order in the Indo-Pacific is increasingly under threat.

In the past decade, unprecedented challenges were mounted in the Indo-Pacific against fundamental principles such as the freedom of navigation, as well as the prohibition of attempts to unilaterally change

the status quo by force or coercion. Should these infringements in the Indo-Pacific be somehow perceived as being acquiesced to by the rest of the world, including by Europe, the very credibility and integrity of international law would be compromised. Severe disruptions to supply chains and sea lanes would also be inevitable. The damage would thus be global, not local. I believe that the repercussions are already starting to be felt here in Europe. Likewise, Japan cannot afford to be indifferent to the state of the rule-based international order around Europe. That is why we have maintained restrictive measures against Russia over its actions in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine, in partnership and solidarity with Europe. Today, we announced the G7 Foreign Ministers' statement on Ukraine.

The rule-based international order has also been shaken by acts of economic coercion and repression of human rights. Japan is strongly condemning the situation in Myanmar and urging the military regime to immediately stop resorting to violence, to release those detained, and to swiftly restore democracy. Regarding Hong Kong and Xinjiang, Japan has been conveying to China our serious concern over the human rights situation, including during a recent bilateral talk between the two foreign ministers. North Korea continues to develop its nuclear and missile capabilities, as evidenced by the recent launches of ballistic missiles, in violation of UN Security Council Resolutions. The resolution of the issue of the abductions of foreign nationals by North

Korea, including Japanese nationals, is long overdue.

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4. Maintain and reinforce the rule-based international order in the Indo-Pacific

Honorable Chairs and Members,

Such attacks on the established rule-based order need a concerted response. For Japan, in addition to our alliance with the U.S., our partnership with our neighbors including the ASEAN members, South Asian countries and the Pacific Island countries is of vital importance with a view to forging multi-faceted partnerships to safeguard the

established rule-based order. As mentioned earlier, the QUAD, comprising Japan, the US, Australia and India, is also proving instrumental in mobilizing commitments in defense of the rule-based international order.

We have high hopes for Europe to be present and proactive in the region in defense of the rule-based order. Japan is thus working closely both with the EU and its member states. Last October, the Japanese Self-Defense Forces and EU NAVFOR conducted a joint anti-piracy exercise in the Gulf of Aden and a joint port call on Djibouti. Furthermore, Japan and the EU are working on joint projects including those aimed at building the capacity of our regional partners. The

recent joint maritime exercise “La Pérouse” joined by Japan, France, the U.S., Australia and India and the planned dispatch of German military vessels to the region also demonstrate the strong solidarity among like-minded countries.

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5. A case for Japan-EU partnership on connectivity in the Indo-Pacific

Honorable Chairs and Members,

Equally urgent is the enhancement of the economic resilience of the Indo-Pacific, which should enable the region to withstand ongoing

disruptions to the rule-based order. This is where connectivity comes into play. Connectivity increases resilience.

By definition, development cooperation should never increase the vulnerability and dependency of its recipients. However, regrettably, this has not always been the case lately, including in the Indo-Pacific.

What is necessary, therefore, is the development of credible options for connectivity projects that truly enhance the resilience of the region.

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 through mobilizing available resources and expertise from like-minded and capable countries, international organizations, and the

private sector.

In forging and leading such an inclusive partnership, Japan and the EU are natural partners. Here is why.

First, our “shared strategy”. The “Japan-EU Partnership on Sustainable Connectivity and Quality Infrastructure”, signed in 2019, builds on a shared strategy. That is, our shared conviction that sustainable growth is only possible by developing transparent, open, inclusive and sustainable connectivity, and within a rule-based order.

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Second, “achievements and trust”. The history of Japan after World War II has been one of struggle for recovery and reconstruction following the path of a peace-loving nation and multilateralism with the UN at the center, jointly working with its neighbors to enhance connectivity. Within a couple of decades, from being a recipient of economic help from foreign countries, Japan emerged as one of the major industrialized economies and major donors, together with the vibrant Indo-Pacific region. To date, Japan remains committed to this joint endeavor. Together with our regional partners, Japan is continuing to work on major infrastructure projects, while also jointly tackling new challenges such as digital connectivity. In doing so, we have always put a great emphasis on sustainability and environment

protection. This commitment and these achievements allowed Japan to earn trust. According to a recent survey, conducted by a Singaporean research institute, Japan ranks No 1 as ASEAN's most trusted partner according to professionals in the region. The EU came second in this survey. The Japan-EU connectivity partnership is thus a dream duo of No 1 and No 2 trusted partners for the region.

Third, "tangible results." While these are needed fast, the Japan-EU partnership has a head start. In addition to the Indo-Pacific, Japan has been active in other parts of the world, including in Africa. The TICAD process, an open and inclusive multilateral forum led by Japan since 1993 in close cooperation with the African Union, has successfully

mobilized resources, while allowing the partnership to continuously update its strategy. I would like to remind you that the EU is regularly invited to TICAD meetings. Japan has also been active in regions closer to the EU, as exemplified by its Western Balkan Cooperation Initiative that supports economic reforms in the region. In short, Japan and the EU are both omnipresent, in many cases playing complementary roles and finding synergy. As was confirmed during a recent bilateral development policy dialogue, such cases of synergy and complementarity range from economic corridors to sustainability projects like water resource management, in various parts of the world such as the Mekong area, Central Asia, the Caucasus and Africa. Such a solid foundation is also enabling Japan and the EU to advance

swiftly in their work to identify possible joint projects.

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Fourth, and lastly, “inclusive partnerships”. Forging inclusive partnerships has been Japan’s priority. Take the concept of “Quality infrastructure”, one of the core elements of sustainable connectivity.

Based on its own experience, Japan has long advocated the necessity to develop a set of principles for quality infrastructure projects, in order to ensure that they contribute to the sustainable growth of the local economy. In 2019, with the support of the EU, the US, China and other G20 countries, the “G20 Principles for Quality Infrastructure Investment” were endorsed at the G20 Osaka summit. The concept

of “Data Free Flow with Trust” under the Osaka Track, another key component of connectivity, was launched on the occasion of this meeting. The QUAD, mentioned earlier, also developed a platform of partnership for health-connectivity. The joint initiative recently announced by QUAD leaders aims to ensure the availability of Corona vaccines in the Indo-Pacific, especially for its most vulnerable members. Japan’s partnership extends well beyond the Indo-Pacific.

In the area of space, Japan has been participating in the International Space Station Program since the start of its operation in 1998. A little closer to home, Japan has been active in the framework of the Arctic Council, with a view to promoting sustainable economic activities with due consideration for the vulnerable Arctic ecosystem and the lives of

indigenous peoples. On the EU side, I understand that connectivity is likely to be discussed at next month's EU-India Summit, as well as with other partners including the ASEAN, Africa and the US. Japan and the EU are thus now crucial focal points for various inclusive partnerships related to connectivity.

Honorable Chairs and Members,

Lastly, let me stress that a Free and Open Indo Pacific does not aim to contain nor to exclude any country, including China.

As mentioned earlier, inclusiveness is fundamental for the Indo-

Pacific. China, which is the EU's biggest trading partner, is also Japan's biggest trading partner. There is no doubt that, for Japan, China is the most important and influential neighbor in the region, and we intend to continue to develop stable bilateral relations based on mutual trust with the country. Moreover, to meet major global challenges such as climate change, trade, health, development and international finance, it is imperative to have China on board, and to have China assume a responsibility commensurate with its huge influence as the world's second largest economy. Today, China still receives a large amount of financial support from the international community, including from the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development of the World Bank Family, the Global Environment

Facility and the Asian Development Fund.

At the same time, recent developments in the East China Sea and the South China Sea are also of serious concern. In 2020, the intrusions of Chinese government vessels into Japan's territorial waters and their navigation in Japan's contiguous zone escalated to an unprecedented level, including in terms of the frequency and intensity.

The situation has been aggravated by Chinese government vessels repeatedly approaching and pursuing Japanese fishing boats. Japan is determined to oppose these attempts to unilaterally change the status quo by force or coercion, which are in breach of international law. In the South China Sea, China has continued the militarization

of the disputed features and frequently conducts military exercises. It appears that China also launched ballistic missiles last year in the region. Japan will continue to emphasize that all parties involved in the South China Sea should work towards the peaceful resolution of disputes in accordance with international law, including the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

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6. Conclusion

Honorable Chairs and Members,

Let me conclude by stressing that, for our strategic partnership to

function, this parliament's role is vital. We hope to continue to engage closely with this parliament, including by further promoting parliamentary exchanges.

Thank you for your attention. I look forward to the discussion.