

Friends of Europe March 10th

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Good morning, distinguished participants, Ladies and Gentlemen.

Today is the very eve of three years since the Great East Japan Earthquake in Tohoku.

Following from last year, this week has been designated "Japan week", with Japan related events taking place here in Brussels.

I would like to extend my appreciation to Friends of Europe and JICA, who have jointly organized this conference during Japan week, to discuss the next stage in Japan -EU relations.

While three years have passed since the disaster, every effort is being made toward reconstruction.

Though still long way to go, people are moving forward and rebuilding their lives.

Just after the disaster, the Japan-EU summit took place and both parties decided to start the process for parallel negotiations on the Japan-EU SPA and EPA. And one year ago, these negotiations started.

Here today I think it is appropriate to remind ourselves of the overall vision of the Japan-EU relationship.

The starting point in my thinking is that Japan and the EU have the responsibility to lead others by example.

Since Japan and the EU are two of the global leaders with mature democracies. And we are also two robust "soft power" countries.

But how do we lead others?

My answer is that we lead others by acting together and setting together norms and standards.

The question follows, in which areas will we act together and set norms and standards together?

My answer is that in areas such as promoting universal values, democracy, human rights, rule of law, consolidating peace and security, promoting free trade,

Friends of Europe March 10th

safeguarding the environment, health, safety, leveling up science and technology, sophisticating education and so on.

And certainly economic development is one of those areas. We need to cooperate with each other to enhance democracy, support basic human needs and strengthen governance of the world.

By acting together and setting norms and standards in these areas, Japan and the EU will inject new added values to global dynamism.

The SPA and EPA are the tools which enable us to ceaselessly and consciously inject new added value to global dynamism.

The world surrounding us is dynamically changing day by day.

But just to cope with current global dynamism is not enough for us.
And just to ride on the wave of global dynamism is not enough for us.

Our task is to inject new added value and set the tide in a trajectory that is more positive for us.

We have a responsibility to make our partnership a vehicle which has a profound and positive impact on global peace and security, a vehicle which strengthen our own and the global economy.

The evident potential within Japan-EU relations, if fully utilized, can be of great benefit, not just to us, but to the whole world.

To realize this vision and have a truly added value to global dynamism, Japan and the EU have set out to conclude the Japan-EU SPA and the EPA.

Through our negotiations, Japan and the EU are trying to enhance both our economic transaction and political cooperation.

But, the Japan-EU EPA and SPA should not stop at that point.

For Japan and the EU to successfully realize a vision, we will have to overcome certain challenges.

First, we must endeavor to make sure that the content of the agreements is substantial and will have real impact.

Friends of Europe March 10th

And this impact should be targeted not only for the coming few years, but for at least decades after the agreement come into force.

Second, it is crucially important that our agreements are relevant to the speed of the global dynamism.

If we take too long, we run the risk that the SPA and EPA will be irrelevant when they are concluded.

This is why we must consider the importance of a swift conclusion of the negotiations.

Third, on this journey we will have to overcome certain roadblocks.

We will overcome these roadblocks with a common vision, accompanied by our wisdom, imagination, passion and guts.

I state with strong conviction that the Japan and EU EPA and SPA which embodies our shared values, responsibilities and commitments will drive global dynamism for the better.

I would like to once again appreciate the fact that Friends of Europe and JICA have taken the effort to bring this important event together.

I am very much looking forward to gaining insights from all of you who have gathered today.

Thank you.