EC-JAPAN RELATIONS AT A TURNING POINT

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My topic today is “EC-Japan relations at a turning point”. I would like to speak on the basis of my experience during the last three years. Since I came to Tokyo in September 1981, as Counsellor for press and information at the EC Delegation, I have had the privilege to watch and also to participate a little bit in the development of the EC-Japan relations.

I

Your meeting today is taking place, indeed, at a very interesting and important time. Firstly, Mr. Nakasone was recently renominated as Prime Minister; it was not probably as easy as he hoped, but anyway it is a fact, so now we have two more years of the Nakasone government. Secondly, there is also a turning point in the United States with the re-election of Mr. Reagan, for four years this time: according to the newspapers, it will also open a kind of new era with a turning point in the Japan-US relationship.
But, the third side of the triangle, if I may say so, which consists of the European Community, is also experiencing some changes, as you all know. We have a new Commission starting in January 1985 with a new President, Mr. Jacques DELORS, former Minister for Economy and Finance in France, and with quite an important, should I say "rejuvenation" of the EC Commission, because about four Members only will stay from the former Commission. We have about ten new Members and we will lose, for instance, familiar figures to Japanese people, like Vice-President HAFERKAMP, who as you know was in charge of External Relations and Viscount DAVIGNON who came also very often to Japan and who is in charge of industrial affairs and science and technology.

Besides these personal changes, what is the situation of the EC-Japan relations? I would say first, that there is a lot of progress in the knowledge of each other, of Japan and EC, and acknowledgement of one another. My second point will be to try to assess what has happened inside this framework of knowledge, what steps we have achieved in our relationship. My third point, in a way of conclusion, will be to try to evaluate what we'll have to do together in the near future.

II

Reciprocal knowledge: we have made a lot of progress. Let us look first from the European point of view. When I left for Japan, in 1981, I remember discussing with my friends before my
departure. For them, Japan was a kind of "terra incognita". Strange names of people speaking a strange language. Nobody knew very much about its economy, its history. The main image of Japan was centered on consumer goods and electronics, VTRs, cars, motorbikes and so on. But during the last three years a lot of missions came from Europe to Japan, and have got a first-hand experience of Japan. Also a lot of European journalists visit Japan nowadays. One of my EC colleagues, Mr. Wilkinson, wrote a few years ago a book with the title: "EC-Japan misunderstandings". Today, misunderstandings have not completely disappeared, but there is a marked improvement from the European side, where the knowledge of Japan is making great progress.

Concerning the knowledge of Europe in Japan, you know the situation better than me and you have indeed a big role in it since you are teaching about the European Community. Thank you for doing a very good job. Recently, I come across of more and more Japanese people who know not only about the EC-Japan "Boeki masatsu"!—but who have a knowledge of the European Community.

In our EC Delegation in Japan, we also are making efforts to improve the knowledge. For instance, we are organizing "EC Weeks" during which we try to explain about the nature and life of the European Community. The first one took place in Hachioji with Chuo University. Then we have done Kyoto, Morioka, Takamatsu and Yamagata. Next year we will do some more EC Weeks—each time, by the way, with the help of the university on the spot. So it is just to give you one example of our efforts to
improve the knowledge of EC in the general public of this country. Whenever we propose to hold an EC Week in a Japanese city, we get a very positive and very friendly response from the local University, from the local authorities, from the local newspaper.

Beyond knowledge, there is a problem of acknowledgement, or recognition of what is the European Community. As you know from experience with your students, it is quite a difficult problem, because the European Community is a very strange animal. Mr. Yamanaka, the former MITI Minister used to say jokingly that the EC is like a big snake, or a monster with ten heads, and he was tempted to pluck one head after the other. He didn’t succeed completely. Next year, the EC will even have twelve heads, with Spain and Portugal joining the Community. Therefore, it is quite difficult to explain to the Japanese people the nature of this strange animal, which is multinational, but also where all the nations participating keep their personality. The Japanese society being very homogeneous is a bit a loss when dealing with the European Community, at the same time united and diversified. That is our everyday’s problem in the EC Delegation.

And it is not only a theoretical problem, I mean a kind of topic for discussion among distinguished academics. It is a practical problem, in our relation with Japan. Let me give you one example: We are trying to establish cooperation between Japan and EC on the field of science and technology, which is such an important sector for both our countries. Then, the Japanese authorities ask us some time: “Are you really competent for dealing with this matter? We have already exchanges with France, with Germany
and with other EC countries, but what can we do with the EC as a whole in the scientific field?" And we have to start again explaining the Treaty of Rome, because the nature of the European Community is not completely well—understood in the minds of the political, administrative and business people in Japan.

So, it is not a theoretical problem, but a practical one, especially acute, nowadays, when there's a tendency in international relations to put emphasis on person to person relations. Think of the so-called "Ron—Yasu" relations, for instance! This morning I read with interest an editorial of a Japanese newspaper saying that it is fine that "Ron" and "Yasu" are so nice buddies, and drink tea or sake together, but that it is not the end of international relations, because when one of them will change, you have to start from scratch again, to build another relationship between the leaders at the top. It might work or it might not work.

With the European Community, the situation is different. Of course, we have also official visits like those of Mr. Nakasone and Mr. Abe to Europe recently, and of EC President Thorn to Japan. But we go beyond that. You remember perhaps, the words of Mr. Jean Monnet, the father of the European Community, who said: "Between governments, between political leaders, there is always a danger to forget the lessons of the past. Therefore, we need to establish institutions, so that the experience of the past is incorporated into these institutions, instead of learning from scratch all the time". These institutions incorporate, so to speak, the wisdom in international relations. Such a kind of permanence, of continuity is a basic point for the European Community, not only in itself,
but also for relationship between Japan and Europe.

Again, it is not an academic point or theoretical point. Let's imagine for instance, that there is an agreement between Japan and, say France—I mention it as an example because it is my country—about trade relations. Then, following an election, imagine that there is a change of government in France and that the new French government decides to follow another course towards Japan. The agreement disappears. With the EC, it cannot happen. Dealing with the Community, Japan is not dealing with ten separate countries, but with an institution which has a common policy, decided at a multi-national level. Even if governments change in some of the EC countries, the policy of the Community does not change. Therefore, I think that for you, Japanese, the EC is an interesting partner and a good partner because it is united. So you have a vested interest, if I may say so, in the success, in the progress, in the solidity of the European Community.

III

Some time ago we have had a very precise example of what I just explained. It was in the fall of 1982. You remember that the French invented the system of sending the Japanese VTRs to Poitiers for passing customs examination before being sold to the customers in France. Before that event, we warned repeatedly the Japanese authorities: "Be careful, something will happen if you don't do anything about Europe-Japan trade imbalance. We might have a strong reaction from one of our countries. And we were
told: "Don't worry, we deal separately with each country". And finally, we had Poitiers, you had Poitiers. Then, the Japanese authorities came to us, the European Commission, and said: "What can we do to, in order to solve this problem which is detrimental to our industry?"

It was a very interesting moment in EC-Japan relations. At that time, you will remember Mr. Nakasone was just elected. A few weeks later, the new Foreign Minister Mr. Abe went to Europe in January 1983. He talked with the Germans, with the Italians, with the British. Everywhere, he heard the same speech: "Something must be done to correct Europe-Japan trade imbalance". Then he came back convinced about the European unity and, in February 1983, the EC concluded an agreement with Japan. From our side, we pledged to convince the French to lift the "Poitiers system". But, in exchange, we convinced the Japanese to exert moderation in their export of some sensitive products like VTRs. It was during this discussion that MITI Minister Yamanaka mentioned the "ten-headed snake". To come back to the title of my lecture today, that was a turning point in our relations. It was from that moment that the Japanese authorities understood the benefit and the necessity of dealing with the European Community as a whole.

Beyond this agreement on export moderation we decided together, Japan and the EC to develop our relationships in other fields than just trade—not to speak of "trade frictions"! Then we launched the idea of cooperation in science and technology. We decided to cooperate in the industrial sector. And we decided finally to
develop political cooperation between Japan and the EC. Then, last May, we had the first meeting at the ministerial level between the Japanese government and the European Commission. So I can frankly say, a turning point was achieved during the years '83-'84.

Nevertheless, problems remain. In spite of our discussions with the Japanese authorities, in spite of the so-called “packages” of measures for opening the Japanese market, our trade relations are still very much imbalanced. We still have to work hard to improve this situation. That is yet, let’s say the worrying aspect of our relations. The sunny side of the picture is that beyond official talks and discussions and agreements like those I mentioned, there are also some cultural aspects in our relationship which are developing. Just to give you one example: Next year, in 1985, we have in Europe a special year for music because it will be three hundred years that Bach, Scarlatti and Händel were born. On this occasion, the European Community is launching a year of music with a lot of concerts and of other musical events. And Japan is participating in it, the only country in Asia to do so.

I would like to conclude with a few words about why the situation between Japan and the EC is not yet exactly what it should be, and why we should still work to improve it.

Let me mention three elements. One is a public opinion’s poll which was done by the Japanese Prime Minister’s office recently, concerning relations of Japan with foreign countries. In the an-
swers mentioning the countries with which Japan should be most friendly, China and US come at the top, then USSR, then the Middle East, then Western Europe which is at the fourth or fifth place. And if you look at the question “With which country should we develop our relations?”, Europe is practically not even mentioned...

Another example which really disturbs me quite a lot is very recent. It happened this week. Foreign Minister Abe gave a press luncheon at the Foreign Press Club in Tokyo, explaining the main aspects and problems of Japanese foreign policy. He spoke about the United States for eighteen minutes, about USSR for six minutes, about Africa for two or three minutes, he mentioned Iran and Irak. He mentioned Korea, China, and then he stopped. No word about Europe...

The last case I would like to mention happened in July this year. The Japanese meteorological made an inquiry about the procurement of a meteorological satellite. Among others, it contacted the European Space Agency (ESA) which, as you know, is an independent body, not linked to the European Community, but in which many countries participate. The ESA made an offer fifty percent cheaper that the American or Japanese offer. According to specialists, the ESA technology is absolutely first class. And, finally, ESA proposed to the Japanese a cooperation not only in manufacturing the satellite, but even for the booster launching it, the famous Ariane rocket. In spite of all these very positive elements, the European offer was flatly rejected. So, you know, things like that happen, but it shows that we still have to improve our cooperation...