

The Third Japan-Europe Aspen Conference

The Japan Economic Foundation (JEF), in addition to publishing the *Journal of Japanese Trade and Industry*, conducts a wide range of activities. Organizing international forums for the exchange of views between opinion leaders from abroad and their Japanese counterparts on issues of mutual concern and interest is one of these functions. The Third Japan-Europe Aspen Conference, held in Kyoto from the 19th to the 22nd of May, was cosponsored by the Institut Aspen France, JEF and two other Japanese organizations. Some 50 representatives, 26 of them from Europe, gathered to discuss issues such as new dimensions in the global situation, the international economy, trade and industry.

Takeshita Noboru former prime minister of Japan; Lord Geoffrey Howe, former deputy prime minister of the United Kingdom; Jean-Louis Bianco, former minister of social affairs of France; and Renato Ruggiero, former minister of trade of Italy were among the distinguished participants. Mr. Takeshita delivered the keynote speech in which he reviewed the current overall international situation. Pointing to the need to establish a new world order, he stressed the importance of

increased cooperation between Japan and Europe. He said the relationship between Japan and Europe has so far been rather modest compared to Japan's ties with other Asian nations and with the U.S.

Following Mr. Takeshita's presentation, Akazawa Shoichi, chairman of JEF, addressed the participants and specifically expressed his anxiety over three issues relating to the former Soviet Union: the disposition of nuclear arms, the danger of another Chernobyl-type nuclear mishap, and the possible exodus of refugees from the former Soviet republics. His views sparked heated debate on the subject of bailing Russia out from its current difficult situation. It soon became apparent that different views exist between Japan and Europe on issues concerning the ex-USSR.

European participants, basing their arguments on the potentially grave repercussions of a possible collapse of Russia, stressed the urgency and need to provide continued massive financial aid to Russia. The Japanese side expressed the view that there is no guarantee that macroeconomic assistance would rescue Russia from today's chaotic conditions and argued that Russia has yet to learn the free market

economy system. This she must do before seeking financial aid.

A new security framework, both regional and global, was another relevant theme on which conference participants had a broad exchange of views. A consensus was reached on the need to build a new security framework which can meet the new world situation creat-

ed after the end of the Cold War. In this regards several optional approaches were proposed. The strengthening of the military function of the United Nations and the need to create a regional security organization in Asia, similar to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in Europe, were among the proposals. However, the Japanese participants expressed caution regarding the proposal to create a regional security system in Asia due to the concerns of Asian countries towards Japan's past military role. Although both European and Japanese participants agreed that the role of the U.S. in international security has changed, both sides shared a common assessment that the presence of the U.S. in Asia, as well as in Europe, is indispensable.

Two of the conference sessions were dedicated to issues of trade and economy. Japan's enormous trade surplus was the target of criticism as usual, and participants from Europe again complained about the difficulty of breaking into the Japanese market. In spite of the fact that Japan holds an enormous trade surplus with Europe, the discussion demonstrated an attitude different from the U.S. In their efforts to soften economic tension, Europe is engaged in more pragmatic and constructive dialogue with Japan than the U.S.

A high-level Japanese government official expressed embarrassment over the Clinton administration's posture on the trade issue between Japan and the U.S. The U.S. is said to be studying, for example, a new trade policy directed at Japan, a policy which may impose a quantitative obligation on imports. This official did not conceal his dismay at the U.S. plan saying that the Japanese government currently has no restrictions regarding U.S. imports. Where there is no quantitative restriction there is no way of setting a figure, he theorized.

The conference was conducted in a very frank atmosphere. Although some arguments were even provocative, the participants were cognizant of the necessity of expressing forthright opinions for making the debate meaningful.

Suetsune Takashi, Managing Editor



The Kyoto conference stressed the necessity of close cooperation between Japan and Europe.