

Opening Remark

TABATA Riichi

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. My name is Tabata, dean of the Graduate School of Economics of Osaka City University. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of you very much for coming to this symposium in spite of your very busy schedules.

Now the topic that we deal with in this international symposium is to review the possibilities of the East Asian community, and as an example of regional integration one of the most advanced and most successful cases of the EU is going to be cited as a reference in looking at the possibilities of Asian regional integration from various angles.

The purpose of holding this symposium will be explained later on by Prof. Yamashita right after me, who is the chairman of the organizing committee of this symposium.

So I would like to speak a little bit from the standpoint of my specialty, that is Russian and central and eastern European economies, to refer to the historical significance of the EC and the EU. For the young generation perhaps it is already a past history, but it was on November 9, 1989 that the Berlin Wall fell down, which led to the collapse of the Soviet control over the Eastern European countries, and three years from then, the Soviet Union itself had collapsed, which is a well-known fact.

And one major factor that led to the collapse of the Soviet Union, I believe, was the development of the EC. In other words, after the Second World War, the eastern European countries, which were in the state of being 'abducted' by the Soviet Union, had finally succeeded in escaping from Soviet control, and this incident is noted as the end of the Soviet control over the Eastern European countries.

For the Eastern European countries, the development of EC had been seen as the development of the receiving end of them when they could escape from Soviet control.

To go a step further, for the Eastern European people, I think there was a mentality that they were going to escape from the Soviet Union, and to return to Europe. And the symbolic events that reflect this are the events which took place in December, 1991. In other words, the collapse of the Soviet Union happened exactly in the same month, December, of 1991, which was

the month in which the Maastricht Conference was held, which led the EC to develop into the EU. So this was a coincidence that was symbolic in nature.

Perhaps I have been too emotional in mentioning all this in my opening remarks, but I just wanted to say that development of the EU was not simply important in the sense of economic integration.

On the other hand, when we look at Asia, Asia has a greater diversity perhaps compared with the EU. Taking the example of Indonesia for instance, there are more than 300 different dialects or languages. And, there are many different religions. Therefore, when we think about such cultural, political and economic diversities in Asia, things may not be so easy here in Asia. But in this symposium, we would like to learn from the development of the EU and think about the possibilities of Asian regional integration from various angles.

And I can easily imagine that this is not so easy task. And not inspite of, but because of this non-easiness, I would like to ask speakers and the panelists to frankly discuss various things, including a bold historical hypothesis that might be possible.

And I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Delegation of the European Commission to Japan, who has given us a great support for this symposium, and I wish the symposium a great success. Thank you.