



European Economic and Social Committee

24 June 2009

WORKSHOP ON “THE FUTURE OF EMPLOYMENT IN THE EUROPEAN UNION AND JAPAN”

Introductory remarks by Eve Päärendson, President of the Contact Group on Japan of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), Vice-President of the Employers Group of the EESC

Your Excellency
Professor Kubo,
Mr Guerrier,

Other distinguished guests especially those who have honoured us by coming all the way from Japan,
and not least
dear colleagues,

I am delighted and feel very honoured to welcome you all today to the European Social and Economic Committee.

I would like to say some words about the EESC and its role, as well as our growing relationship with Japan. The EESC, as you all know is an official EU consultative body set up by the Treaty of Rome consisting of 344 members coming from each Member State, from employers' organisations, chambers of commerce, trade unions, universities, consumer organisations, and other important civil society bodies.

Our role is to **give advice**, based on the experience and knowledge of our members. Many, but not all, EU Member States have national bodies with similar roles.

It is a **unique forum** for **representing** and **informing** civil society **organisations** and **expressing** their **views** as part of the European Union's **formal decision making process**.

In Japan of course civil society plays a different role, but this is becoming ever more important. Today however marks a milestone in developing the Committee's relationship both with Japan and with civil society in Japan

1. 1. EESC and Japan

The EESC is deeply committed to **building contacts** and **developing a strong network with civil society organisations in Japan**. We have already established enduring contacts with Japanese academic institutions, employers' organisations, trade unions, youth, environmental and other organisations.

The EESC adopted its **opinion on "EU-Japan relations: the role of civil society"** in February 2007. In this Opinion the EESC explored the ways in which EU civil society, and civil society in Japan, could cooperate to strengthen links further between EU and Japan, as planned in the Joint Action Plan.

This February we set up our **permanent contact group on Japan**. The Establishment of this important group further underlines this commitment.

The EU Institute in Japan, in Kansai has been a most dynamic and reliable partner in helping us to establish contacts with Japanese universities, and youth, and to deepen our understanding of Japanese CSOs. We especially enjoy very good relations with Kobe University, especially thanks to Prof Kubo we meet regularly to discuss issues of common concern.

I would like to underline some of our more important **joint activities** over the last years:

- **joint workshops** in Kobe on environmental protection, on education and sustainable development,
- meetings with civil society organisations in Osaka, and Kobe,
- **exchange of speakers** (notably Japanese professors who have been giving lectures on the Japanese economy at seminars across Europe whilst European speakers have also participated in meetings in Japan),
- the EESC has provided **internship** opportunities for Japanese students.

These are just a few examples that show the **strong interest that each of our civil society communities have in working together**. But today we are holding a joint meeting for the first time in Brussels to **share thinking** on a major but common-problem. We are sure this will show the value of such meetings for the future.

2. 2. The global crisis – and why today's workshop is important

Today's workshop will look in depth at the prospects for **employment in Japan and Europe** as the current economic and financial crisis develops - the worst global economic and jobs crisis in living memory. It will aim to identify and pursue constructive steps to alleviate the continuing threats to jobs. **Unemployment** is increasing, especially **youth unemployment**. New graduates and other labour market entrants with limited experience are facing a major challenge in finding employment.

Today's workshop will also aim to **identify** and **quantify** the **ongoing impact of the crisis** and **evaluate the stimulus packages adopted so far**.

This crisis has shown us all too clearly that the world economy has become highly interdependent.

Japan is one of the EU's key strategic partners. Close cooperation between us is essential. Japan and the European Union together account for 40% of global GDP. We have a similar political base and shared values – even our challenges are shared: both EU and Japan have **aging populations**, a **diminishing labour force**, and an **overriding need to maximise youth employment**, to **maximise the work-life balance** and **ensure stability in our post-crisis social security networks**.

But, as with every crisis, this crisis will also bring its **major opportunities**. I believe this is a real opportunity to prove the value of increased and deeper dialogue between our civil societies in the EU and Japan.

2.1 Working together in partnership

At a time when social tensions are rising due to anger and widespread insecurity over job losses, businesses, workers organisations, and other organised civil society organisations find themselves at the sharp end - the point where these pressures, fears and anger are at their most acute. Such civil society organisations, **working together in partnership**, have a vital role to play in this time of crisis: these organisations can effectively help the Governments with finding solutions on the ground for tackling this crisis, and to work out recovery plans to escape from the crisis.

My colleague and EESC Vice President, Irini Pari, will shortly present the EESC Programme for Europe: our proposals for economic and social recovery.

The challenges for both Japan and the EU are big. **Protectionism** is a real threat to both. But **increased trade** and **investment** brings **growth** in **employment**.

Increased trade also demands **greater regulatory synergy**, despite all the valuable efforts that have already been made.

Civil society involvement and **support** in all these areas will be essential if we are to find long term solutions. To maintain and create jobs both Europe and Japan will need to give far much greater emphasis to the creation **and development of enterprise**, to **training, retraining** and **reskilling** for **all age-groups**.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

A key purpose of today's workshop is to take this opportunity to share our experiences, and to learn from each other.

Despite active and strong links between **academic institutions, consumer organisations, in Business dialogue**, and close cooperation in several other fields, it is clear that there is plenty of scope to do far more towards developing our civil society relationship. In particular we should look again at the relevant sections the EU-Japan Action Plan involving civil society, especially as it comes up for renewal in 2011: such work can be a critically important element in adding value to EU-Japan relations.

With our 50 years experience of representing civil society, the EESC will have a key role to play regarding the chapters on “**Bringing together peoples and cultures**”, and “**Coping with Global and Societal Challenges**” in particular in developing deeper and stronger links here between the EU and Japan. But we would also encourage both the EU and Japan to maximise civil society involvement wherever possible.

I am sure that especially in the light of our discussions today-it will become increasingly clear exactly what benefits greater involvement of CSOs will bring to our relationship.

Your Excellency, Ladies and Gentlemen, we will discuss today the issues I have just highlighted in these opening remarks.

We will continue with other opening remarks which will then be followed by two thematic sessions with presentations and open discussions which I am sure will be very interesting.

I thank you for your attention and again would like to repeat our warmest thanks and welcome to all our key speakers.

Now I particularly welcome Mr Filip Hamro-Drotz, President of the External Relations’ Section of the EESC, to introduce the EESC and its External Relations, especially its relations with Asia.

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