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The Significance of Cooperation Between Japan and Germany

Minoru KIUCHI

Introduction

I have spent around 10 years in Germany, first as a child, and then as a diplomat with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, and I consider the country my second home. Since becoming a parliamentarian in Japan, I have made it my life's work to develop the cooperative relationship between Japan and Germany, including by serving as Secretary-General of the Japan-Germany Parliamentary Friendship League.

I would like to take this opportunity to pay my respects to Rabea Brauer and all at the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung who work so hard to develop and promote friendship between our two countries, and continue to make an enormous contribution to deepening bilateral relations. I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to them for offering me the great honor of contributing to this publication.

The theme of this article is "The Significance of Cooperation between Japan and Germany"; I will discuss the importance of this bilateral relationship within the international community, and the relationship's development.

The importance of the Japan-Germany relationship

The year 2021 marked the 160th anniversary of friendship between Japan

and Germany. Our two countries, which share this long history of friendly relations, are similar in many ways. First and foremost, among our similarities are our national characters such as diligence and discipline. In addition, both our countries achieved remarkable recoveries from the Second World War, becoming world-leading economic superpowers. SMEs account for 99.5% or more of the domestic companies in both countries. Furthermore, both our countries play key roles in the stability and prosperity of their regions, with Japanese defense spending amounting to US\$53.0 billion, and German defense spending amounting to US\$64.2 billion in FY 2021, ranking among the highest levels in the world. But the most important similarity of all lies in our shared values with regard to freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

In recent years a number of global issues have come to the fore, such as protectionism and global warming, and unilateral attempts by countries such as Russia and China to change the status quo by force, disrupting regional peace and stability. Within this context, Japan and Germany play essential roles and exercise tremendous influence in the Asia-Pacific region and Europe, respectively. Under such circumstances, given that Japan and Germany share the same values and many other similarities, I am convinced that further cooperation between our two countries will benefit from this mutual compatibility, producing one of the world's

strongest bilateral relationships, and enabling us to contribute greatly to worldwide peace and stability.

Development of the Japan-Germany relationship during the Abe administration

During the second Abe administration launched in 2012, relations between Japan and Germany advanced rapidly. In March 2015, Angela Merkel, the German chancellor at the time, visited Japan for the first time in seven years, and our two countries' leaders affirmed their shared values, embarking on a new stage in the development of their relationship of trust.

Until then, Germany had prioritized its relationship with China due to its economic ties with that country, but I believe that the summit meeting in 2015 represented a turning point in Germany's efforts to strengthen its engagement with Asia.

From then on, Prime Minister Abe and Chancellor Merkel held repeated talks, and the resulting cooperation between Japan and Germany has had an extremely significant impact on the world. As advocacy of protectionism gained momentum in the United States and Europe, our two countries defended the free trade regime and played leading roles within the international community, enabling the Japan-European Union

(EU) Economic Partnership Agreement to go into effect in 2019.

Meanwhile, the two leaders' efforts to promote cooperation in the national security field were groundbreaking. With China's maritime expansion in mind, Prime Minister Abe and Chancellor Merkel agreed during their summit meetings in 2019 to oppose unilateral attempts to change the status quo by force, to collaborate in maintaining a world order based on the rule of law, and to cooperate in establishing a "Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP)." In 2020, Germany announced its Policy Guidelines for the Indo-Pacific, indicating that it would cooperate with Japan and strengthen all forms of engagement in the region.

Since the second Abe administration, relations between Japanese and German parliamentarians too have become more active than ever before. Until the COVID-19 pandemic, I myself visited Germany on almost an annual basis and spent time with many German parliamentarians, engaging in discussion with them and learning a great deal in the process. Likewise, many German parliamentarians have visited Japan. These communications have brought pragmatic results, with a wide variety of topics discussed including economic matters such as SME-related policies, science and technology, environmental policies including decarbonization, China's hegemonic ambitions, and national security policies. The Japan-Germany Parliamentary Friendship League, in

which I serve as Secretary-General, had 135 parliamentarians as members as of July 26, 2022, demonstrating how highly Japan's parliamentarians value Germany.

Following the resignation of Prime Minister Abe, the policy of promoting cooperation between Japan and Germany has continued unchanged during the administrations of Yoshihide Suga and Fumio Kishida. During this time, Germany's engagement with the Asia-Pacific region and the strengthening of collaboration between our two countries has advanced. The year 2021 witnessed the signing of the Agreement on the Security of Information, the Japan-Germany Foreign and Defense Ministers' Meeting ("2+2"), the German Navy frigate *Bayern's* visit to Japan and joint exercises involving both countries, followed in 2022 by the deployment of German Eurofighter jets to Japan. Furthermore, in April 2022, Chancellor Scholz demonstrated the importance he places on Japan by choosing it as the first Asian country he visited after taking office. Chancellor Scholz subsequently visited Japan again for the first bilateral Inter-Government Consultations and the G7 Hiroshima Summit.

Further reinforcement of the Japan-Germany relationship

Japan and Germany share much in common, and our two countries'

cooperation and leadership now play a more important role than ever within the international community. We currently face an exceptionally challenging international situation characterized by Russia's invasion of Ukraine and China's maritime expansion based on hegemonic ambitions and the force of arms. It is no exaggeration to say that, without our bilateral cooperation and leadership, it would be impossible to achieve international peace and stability within such a context. It is therefore crucially important not only to hold frequent Inter-Government Consultations addressing various fields such as national security, economy, energy, and environment, but also to ensure that communication between our two countries' parliamentarians takes place regularly.

At the same time, as a Japanese parliamentarian for whom Germany is a second home, and as Secretary-General of the Japan-Germany Parliamentary Friendship League, I will continue dedicating myself to strengthening bilateral cooperation by elevating the relationship between our two countries to a new level.

Conclusion

Japan's former Prime Minister, Shinzo Abe, advanced the cooperation between Japan and Germany further than ever before in various fields, including national security, economy, environment, science and technology, and his passing was a great loss for both our

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nations. He considered Germany to be one of Japan's most important partners and worked hard to establish a relationship of trust, also contributing to the activities of the Japan-Germany Parliamentary Friendship League.

In addition to harboring great individual potential, both Japan and Germany have

roles to play and responsibilities to fulfill by demonstrating leadership within the international community. We must do all in our power to further develop the relationship that former Prime Minister Abe established between our two countries in order to maintain a world order based on the rules he delineated and to realize global stability and prosperity.

Minoru KIUCHI



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After his graduation from the University of Tokyo (Faculty of Arts and Sciences majoring in International Affairs), he started his professional career at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. After first being elected Member of the House of Representatives in 2003, he served as State Minister for Foreign Affairs and State Minister of the Environment, and Visiting Professor at Takushoku University. Kiuchi also functioned as the party's Director for Foreign Affairs Division and Acting Director-General for International Bureau before assuming Chair of the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the House of Representatives. He is concurrently Secretary-General of the Japan-Germany Parliamentary Friendship League.

