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“Japan’s Arctic Policy and Its Challenges”

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Japan's Arctic Policy and Its Challenges

July 28, 2016

Key note address by Kazuko Shiraishi
Japan's Ambassador in Charge of Arctic Affairs

Kazuko Shiraishi is Ambassador in charge of Arctic Affairs. Ambassador Shiraishi has assumed the present position in June, 2015, following her previous assignment as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Japan to Lithuania. She graduated from Sophia University, Tokyo, and entered Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1974. She has worked as Director of International Economic Agreement Division, Senior Foreign Policy Coordinator, and Director of WTO Dispute Settlement Division at the Ministry in Japan. She has also served overseas as Deputy Chief of Mission of the Japanese Embassy in Poland.

Distinguished participants,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me start by expressing my sincere appreciation to Kobe University Polar Cooperation Research Centre (PCRC) for hosting this symposium and inviting me as a speaker. I would like to especially thank Professor Akiho Shibata and all of his staffs for their excellent work to make this symposium possible.

Today, I would like to speak mainly "Japan's Arctic Policy" adopted last October.

Since the adoption of Japan's Arctic Policy, I have devoted myself to making public relations on the policy at Reykjavik, Washington D.C., Anchorage, Boston, Moscow and Seoul. Though I am sure some of you are already well aware of it, please allow me to reiterate its significance for some participants who are not yet familiar with it. Later on, I will touch upon the challenges of the Japan's Arctic Policy, in particular, on the international rule-making on the Arctic.

The policy is Japan's first comprehensive policy on the Arctic. Why does Japan set out its Arctic policy and adopted it last October?

In 2013, Japan, for the first time, identified addressing Arctic issues as one of priorities of "Basic Plan for Ocean Policy". Therefore, formulating the comprehensive policy on the Arctic was long-year task for Japan. Through intensive discussions by all the ministries concerned, our Arctic Policy was finally formulated last October.

The Policy settles on taking actions on the Arctic strategically with cross-sectional perspectives.

Through these actions, Japan seeks to contribute to the international society as a proactive contributor to addressing Arctic issues.

Taking these objectives into account, Japan defines the following seven basic policies.

- (1) Science and Technology: We will make full use of Japan's strength in science and technology from a global view point,
- (2) Environment: We will give full consideration to the Arctic environment and ecosystem, which is vulnerable and low resilience,
- (3) International cooperation: We will ensure the rule of law and promote international cooperation in a peaceful and orderly manner,
- (4) Indigenous people: We will respect the right of indigenous people to continuity in their traditional economic and social foundations,
- (5) National security: We will pay full attention to security environments in the Arctic,
- (6) Economic and social compatibility: We will aim for economic and social compatibility with climate and environmental changes, and
- (7) Arctic Sea Route and development of resource: We will seek possible economic chances for the use of the Arctic Sea Route and for the development of resource.

Based on these basic policies, Japan spells out three specific initiatives to be taken.

The first initiative is research and development. While the Arctic climate change has become a common global issue, there still remain many unknowns. Japan strives to examine what is going on in the Arctic and its impact on the global environment through projects like five year scientific project on the Arctic under the name of "Arctic Challenge for Sustainability", in short "ArCS" project.

Strengthening observation and analysis systems, developing the most advanced observation instruments, establishment of a research network in Japan and establishment of research stations in the Arctic states are important issues to be taken.

The second initiative is sustainable use of the Arctic. In order to promote preparation of an environment for the utilization of the Arctic Sea Route by Japanese shipping companies and others, Japan identifies the natural, technical, systemic, and economic challenges of the route and calls for the establishment of a maritime navigation system to help ships traveling through the Arctic.

Japan will also take actions to enhance Japanese economic activities in the Arctic,

especially in the area of exploitation of natural resources. In the development of marine living resources, Japan will work with other countries to make a framework for preservation towards sustainable use.

International cooperation is the third. Active participation in response to global issues regarding the Arctic and formulation process of international rules for the Arctic is important.

We attach the priorities to further contribution to activities of the AC and expansion of international and bilateral cooperation with the Arctic and other countries by promoting scientific cooperation and strengthening joint international Arctic research.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Nine months have passed since the Policy was adopted. Now how to strategically implement the Policy is the most important task for Japan. I would like to view briefly how these three initiatives have developed so far.

Among three initiatives, the activities of the research and development have been the most steadily advancing, mainly based on the “ArCS” project, a new research network in Japan launched in April, having a purpose of promoting interdisciplinary initiatives and sharing research infrastructure. New observation centers in Canada and Russia are expected to be open soon. I am sure the international community will continue to have much expectation of our research activities.

Business activities, the Arctic Sea Route use, mineral resources, and marine living resources of the Arctic are mid and long-term efforts and premature to evaluate. We continue the initiatives taken before steadily.

The Arctic Sea Route. The Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism (MLIT) regularly holds conference with shipping companies and ministries concerned and exchanges views for further utilization of the route. Although there is no operational experience of our shipping companies, currently, one of them is in the process of preparing for LNG transportation from the Yamal peninsula via the Arctic Sea Route. In addition, MEXT is currently working on systems to support maritime navigation such as a system to predict sea ice distribution and one to forecast weather.

Mineral resources. We continue financial support for Greenland Petroleum Exploration Co., Ltd. which is participating in an exploration project in an ocean area northeast of Greenland, via the Japan Oil, Gas, and Metals National Corporation (JOGMEC).

Finally, we look into the international cooperation. As I touched upon earlier, in advancing the international cooperation, we need to be engaged in the rule-making on the Arctic, strengthen contributions to the AC and enhance cooperation with the Arctic and other states.

I am confident our contribution to the AC, and cooperation with the Arctic and other states have been advanced steadily.

I would like to share some of the recent bilateral cooperation with the Arctic states.

At the leader's level, I have to touch upon the Joint Statement on a Strategic Partnership between Finnish President Niinistö and Prime Minister Abe in March. In the Joint Statement, the two leaders confirmed their commitment to advance dialogue and cooperation in their shared interests in the Arctic such as Northern Sea Route. As this follow-up, on May 18, the Embassy of Finland in Japan held Japan-Finland Arctic Expertise Seminar to boost up bilateral economic cooperation on the Arctic.

For another couple of the bilateral cooperation with the Arctic states, we have one with Norway. Japan-Norway Arctic Science and Innovation Week was held last month. This seminar aims to strengthen bilateral cooperation through the presentation of Arctic research by participants of both countries.

In the field of research activities, our National Institute of Polar Research and Polar Knowledge Canada concluded the MoU on the scientific cooperation last month. This will be expected to advance our joint research activities at Canadian High Arctic Research Station, CHARS, which will be operational in July next year.

Finally, as to the cooperation with non-Arctic states, Japan, China and Korea held the 1st Trilateral High-Level Dialogue on the Arctic in April. The dialogue aims to deepen cooperation over the Arctic among the three countries. This dialogue was launched at the trilateral summit meeting last November.

Now, what about the case with the rule-making on the Arctic?

To start with, what kind of rules on the Arctic does exist? I think there are mainly four different types of them.

First, we can easily think about the rules of international law of the sea and maritime law. The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) is the major one, which is universally applied to the Oceans including the Arctic Ocean. In addition, "Polar Code", which was formulated under the International Maritime Organization (IMO), is another good example.

Next, there are orders formulated under the framework of the AC. As the AC has developed to policy-shaping body, the AC has so far concluded two legally binding treaties, that is, "Agreement on Cooperation on Aeronautical and Marine Search and Rescue in the Arctic" of 2011 and "Agreement on Cooperation on Marine Oil Pollution Preparedness and Response in the Arctic" of 2013. In addition to them, the AC is now preparing the third legally binding agreement, which aims to enhance international Arctic scientific cooperation. Prof. Shibata will give the presentation to you later.

Third, rules formulated outside the framework of the AC. The rules for issues which only the AC member states cannot address properly. We can find an example of this in the field of fisheries. Future measures to prevent unregulated commercial fishing in the high seas area of the central Arctic Ocean, have been discussed among the five coastal states of the Arctic Ocean and other four states including Japan and EU. Prof. Morishita will talk about it later.

Finally, rules for business. They are also outside the framework of the AC. As an example, I would also like to refer to the case of Global Agenda Council on the Arctic (GAC-Arctic) in the World Economic Forum. The GAC-Arctic was established in 2012 to contribute to the sustainable management of the Arctic. From Japan, Ms. Yoko Kamikawa, Member of the House of Representatives and the former Minister of Justice, joins as a member.

In January this year, GAC-Arctic released “Arctic Investment Protocol”. This is a guideline for the responsible development of the Arctic, in which six principles of action such as “Consult and integrate science and traditional ecological knowledge” are specified. I think this is also one of the soft laws on the Arctic in the private sector.

We have been involved in these legal orders on the Arctic, though the extent of involvement varies. With regard to the rules formulated outside the framework of the AC, we have been engaged in the discussions as one of the parties concerned. On the other hand, as to the rules formulated under the framework of the AC, while we participate in the discussions as an observer, our involvement is limited because we are not the parties to any agreements prepared under the AC.

Whether or not we are involved in such discussions on the rule-making directly, in view of the global-scale repercussions of the Arctic issues, I am confident that Japan’s more active engagement in the discussions on the rule-making is required and meaningful for effective rules on the Arctic. In order to increase our involvement in the rule-making, there are two key challenges.

First, expanding scientific expertise. Scientific data, analysis and forecast on what is going in the Arctic lay foundations for discussions on the rule-making on the Arctic. Japan can contribute more in this area, utilizing scientific expertise based on long experience of scientific observation and research in the Arctic, and advanced technology.

Next, all-out efforts from industry, academia, and the government are also required. In this regard, the convening of this seminar is highly welcomed and meaningful as this seminar is working on research on the Arctic legal and policy issues.

I would like to conclude my remarks, hoping that discussions at this symposium will provide fruitful inputs for our future contributions to the rule-making on the Arctic.

Thank you very much for your kind attention.

(END)