

Session3: New Opportunities in the Arctic Region

Co-Chairs,
Distinguished members of delegation,

It is indeed a great honor to have a great opportunity to exchange views frankly with membership countries, observer countries and organizations. On behalf of Members of National Diet of Japan as an observer country of the Arctic Council, I would like to extend my sincere appreciation to Mr. Mikhail Slipenchuk, Member of the State Duma for inviting us to this conference as well as Mr. Erik Sivertsen, Chair of the Standing Committee of the Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region (SCPAR) and everyone here.

【Background of my work on the Arctic】

First, I would like to touch upon the background of why I am here.

Since 2000, my first electoral victory, I have consistently worked on issues on water, which is indispensable for human lives and sustainable global environment. I was deeply engaged in the establishment of two Parliamentary Leagues related to Water and Ocean, and the formulation of the Basic Act on Ocean Policy. As I have worked on the water issues, I strongly realized that the impact of the environmental changes in the Arctic has global-scale repercussions and that the economic activities in Japan may affect this environmental change. Motivated by this recognition, in 2013, I, along with my colleagues, established the Parliamentary League of Arctic Frontier Study, where I serve as the Secretary General.

Members of the League share the recognition that Japan, as a maritime state, should be responsible for addressing the Arctic issues with a new mindset to regard them as global issues. My main concern has been the sustainability of traditional life and culture of indigenous peoples, affected by declining sea ice of the Arctic Ocean. In the course of our activities, in October 2014, our League called on the Government of Japan to formulate a national Arctic strategy. As a result, in last October, the Government of Japan adopted “Japan’s Arctic Policy”. On top of these, our League has held study meetings where we invite Ambassadors of the Arctic nations in Tokyo to exchange views to deepen cooperative relationship and be able to propose initiatives only Japan can suggest.

In addition, since September 2014, I have been working for Global Agenda Council on Arctic of World Economic Forum, where people with various backgrounds join as members. Even during my tenure as the Minister of Justice, I joined late-night telephone conferences. In a series of conferences we discussed how the international society should address the Arctic issues from various perspectives of the industry, government and academia.

By virtue of these successful efforts, the attention to the Arctic is rapidly growing in Japan. The Arctic is important area in the sense that the area, wherein unique history and culture live long, has significant impacts on global environment and eco-system. With this recognition and backed up by such a public opinion, I will continue to be working on the Arctic with my confidence that Japan can play a bigger role in keeping the Arctic irreplaceable home for habitants there and the source of a blessing for all mankind.

【Japan's Arctic policy】

Now I would like to introduce “Japan's Arctic Policy”, which I referred to as part of efforts of our Parliamentary League.

Japan has conducted observation and research on the Arctic for more than half a century. Japan's Arctic Policy settles on taking actions on the Arctic with cross-sectional perspectives, such as diplomacy, national security, environment, transportation, and exploitation of natural resources. Through these actions, Japan seeks to be a proactive contributor to the international community in addressing Arctic issues, based on science and technology which is Japan's strength.

Taking these objectives into account, Japan defines such basic policies as consideration to fragile and low-resilient Arctic environment, respect of the right of indigenous peoples, use of advanced technology for scientific elucidation of the mechanisms of Arctic warming and countermeasures, promotion of international cooperation, and development of resources. Based on these basic policies, Japan puts forward three specific initiatives that we will further advance, that is, research and development, international cooperation, and sustainable development of the Arctic.

In seeking possible economic opportunities the Arctic presents,

Japan's Arctic Policy aims to promote preparation for the utilization of the Arctic Sea Route and to continue financial supports for the development of mineral resources. However, the prerequisite for these economic activities is that they will not cause irreversible impact to the vulnerable Arctic environment. Therefore, in conducting such economic activities, we also need to work on substantial scientific expertise for appropriate decision-making and development of technology to conserve the Arctic environment.

Another opportunity could be the utilization of Japan's technologies for people living in the Arctic regions. For example, their advanced technologies, such as material technologies for building resilient infrastructure, ICT technologies with improving digital infrastructure in order to promote health care and education, will be useful for people living in the region. I hope Japanese companies recognize the opportunity not only in shipping or resources but also in the improvement of quality of life there.

【Needs of International Cooperation】

In order to advance the development of the Arctic in a manner beneficial to the indigenous peoples, a wide range of international cooperation including scientific one is very essential as highlighted in "Japan's Arctic Policy" because little is known about the eco-system and the mechanism of environmental change in the Arctic.

Japan has so far worked hard to clarify the mechanism of the Arctic environment through the joint research and human resources development with the countries participating here. For instance, both Japan and Russia have cooperated to train young researchers at the facilities in the Far East for long years. On top of this, at Cape Baranov station, a new observation platform in Russia, Japanese researchers will conduct observation in cooperation with Russian researchers. Looking at Northern Europe, Japan has conducted various joint researches mainly at Ny-Ålesund as well as the observation of a glacier and ice sheet in Greenland. Moreover, in Canada, Japanese researchers use Canadian icebreakers in the joint research on sea ice and ocean observation of the Arctic Ocean. Japan has enjoyed robust cooperative relationship with your countries.

In accelerating international cooperation, both multilateral and bilateral approach will be needed. It is necessary for us to let outcomes

gained through bilateral cooperation reach out to multilateral one. Further, we should share the outcomes such as data with international community toward the responsible development and appropriate decision-making. At World Economic Forum held in January this year, Global Agenda Council on Arctic released “Arctic Investment Protocol” as the outcome of a series of discussions. This protocol is a guideline for the responsible development of the Arctic in which we specifies six principles of action. I would like to underscore that “Consult and Integrate Science and Traditional Ecological Knowledge” is one of them.

In light of this, our 5 year Arctic research project launched last September in Japan, called “Arctic Challenge for Sustainability” or “ArCS” would be welcomed. This is national flag-ship project from 2015 to 2019 and the budget of FY 2016 is 760 million JPY, about 6.3 million EURO.

The 3 pillars of this project are 1) expansion of research base and stations to facilitate international collaborative studies, 2) dispatching young scientists to institutions abroad and 3) sending Japanese experts to working groups and taskforces of Arctic Council and other international committees. In principle, the research projects under ArCS release the findings of research to the public. On top of that, ArCS advances a multidisciplinary approach, which collaborates with not only researchers of natural science but also humanities, social science, and computer science.

【Closing】

I regard the Arctic as one of our global commons to be protected by global community. To solve the Arctic issues and, in particular, to cooperate in realizing the sound development of the Arctic is the very contribution to all mankind. I would like to pay my respect to participants today, who have devoted themselves to solving issues common to all mankind. I would like to keep good relationship with you all with common goal for the people in the Arctic.

Lastly, I would like to express again my appreciation for this opportunity to allow me to exchange ideas equally. I promise as a parliamentarian that I will contribute further to Japan’s efforts to solve the Arctic issues together. Thank you very much for your attention.