

## **Japan and EU need swift deals**

**By Kojiro Shiojiri - 28.03.2013 / 16:03 CET (EuropeanVoice.com)**

**The prospect of deeper trading and political relationships between Japan and the European Union must be seized.**

On 25 March, Japan and the European Union officially launched negotiations on the Japan-EU economic partnership agreement (EPA) and an agreement covering broad political co-operation.

In announcing the decision, Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and the presidents of the European Council and European Commission – Herman Van Rompuy and José Manuel Barroso – stated that, as global partners that have common values, Japan and the EU should lift their relations into a higher, more strategic plane.

The process of negotiating an ambitious and comprehensive EPA and making the Japan-EU relationship closer and more substantial can now begin in earnest, with the first negotiations on both agreements starting in April. Japan and the EU are committed to concluding the two agreements at the earliest date possible.

Throughout the process, we have gained momentum. The official opening of negotiations does, though, represent a significant shift of gear. When we sit down again in the coming weeks for the first negotiations, we will begin to unlock the extraordinary potential within these agreements.

### **Economic Partnership Agreement**

The Japan-EU EPA is a testament to the principle of pursuing free, open, interconnected economies. It should be deep and comprehensive in order to embed economic growth both in Japan and the EU. The agreement would also be able to contribute to the development of the world economy.

At its core, the EPA will reduce tariffs to boost trade. However, the agreement will go beyond a traditional free-trade agreement, and the non-tariff matters (including regulatory change) are the bigger prize, with a bigger impact on economies and societies. We are more interested in reform to build a more resilient economy and society.

The significance of the Japan-EU EPA must be considered in context: our joint contribution to global output, which is currently 30%. In light of the dynamic transformation of the world economy, the EPA should serve as a platform to create new business opportunities worldwide.

### **Political agreement**

We will also substantially enhance our partnership in peace and security areas, by enshrining our principles in a substantial, broad-based political agreement. This agreement will provide a legal foundation for a stronger partnership to address a wide range of bilateral and global issues; this is part of a shared contribution to global stability, security and sustainable growth.

This agreement is of paramount importance as it will help us elevate each other and allow us to tackle effectively the issues that we both face in a world that is changing rapidly.

Japan and the EU should be closer; the width and depth of our relations are not commensurate with the importance of our partnership. The political agreement can play an important role in expanding the horizon of the bilateral partnership and in creating new impetus for deeper co-operation. The agreement is a major opportunity; we should seize it.

### **Looking forward**

We need now to act with a sense of urgency, with determination and with courage. Time is of the essence. We should conclude the agreements in the shortest possible time.

If it takes too long, we will be in a very different world. It is our responsibility not to take too long.