



The 20th EU–Japan Summit in Brussels

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The 20th EU-Japan Summit was held on 28 May in Brussels. The leaders of both sides commemorated the bilateral relations of the last two decades. To-date, the EU-Japan cooperation has been managed by two arrangements: the *Joint Declaration on Relations between the European Community and its Member States and Japan* (Hague, 1991), and the *Action Plan for EU-Japan Cooperation* (Brussels, 2001). The Hague Declaration stated that the EU and Japan shared a similar set of principles and values (such as freedom, democracy, the rule of law and human rights) and it established an institutional consultative framework and an annual summit meetings between the Japanese Prime Minister and the European Council and Commission Presidents. In 2001, a decade later, the EU and Japan adopted the *Action Plan for EU-Japan Cooperation* for the next decade. This Action Plan defined more than a hundred areas where the EU and Japan could work together. The following fields of bilateral cooperation were identified: promoting peace and security, strengthening the economic and trade partnership, coping with global and societal challenges, bringing together people and cultures. The Action Plan was criticized several times because it dealt with a wide range of problems while offering few concrete measures and initiatives.

The commemorative Summit on 28 May focused on two topics: (1) bilateral cooperation following the Great East Japan Earthquake and the accident at the Fukushima-Daiichi nuclear power plant, and (2) working towards closer political and economic ties between the EU and Japan (revising the Action Plan of 2001). The leaders of the EU and Japan reaffirmed their intent to develop and expand bilateral activities on nuclear safety, the supply of safe and sustainable energy and its efficient use, and natural disaster prevention. Last year in Tokyo they entrusted a High-Level Group with the task of reviewing all aspects of the EU-Japan economic and political relations and defining a framework for strengthening them. This High-Level Group has made a lot of progress in its work over the last few months. On that basis, at the 20th Summit Japanese and European leaders decided to start discussions on defining the scope and level of negotiations on a deep and comprehensive

free trade agreement and a binding agreement covering political, global and other forms of sectoral cooperation. EU leaders first held out the prospect of launching free trade negotiations with Japan in their final statement after a summit on 24-25 March. British diplomats played an important role by offering a potential launch of FTA talks. The success of negotiations will mainly depend on whether Japan is ready to eliminate restrictions on government procurement and non-tariff barriers. EU trade diplomats now think Japan is more willing to deal with these sensitive questions because it is afraid of competition in the EU marketplace from its neighbour South Korea, who concluded a free trade agreement with the EU last year. At the 20th Summit, Herman van Rompuy, the President of the European Council, said that, although the objective was clear, Japan and the EU still had a long way to go before concluding a free trade agreement. He also emphasized that symbolically and politically it was a big step forward when two of the world's largest trading partners jointly confirmed their intention to work towards a free trade agreement.

At the commemorative Summit, Japanese and European leaders discussed other 'traditional topics' such as cooperation on security, reintegration and development assistance in Afghanistan, counter-piracy near Somalia, multilateral trade negotiations under the WTO, climate change, non-proliferation and people-to-people exchanges.

In sum, we can say that the 20th EU-Japan Summit has not brought a big breakthrough. But bilateral relations will progress in the usual way: slowly but wrapped in 'kizuna' (the bonds of friendship).

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