

## Report

# EU – Japan Strategic dialogue: climate change cooperation as a pathway to the future

Peter Václavík



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On February 1, 2019, the EU and Japan concluded an Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) that became the key element of an enhanced relationship between the EU and Japan. Japan is the EU's second-biggest trading partner in Asia after China. At the same time, Japan represents the 7th largest partner for EU exports and imports of goods. However, what does the growing relationship mean in terms of climate change cooperation and how can it be enhanced? Japan, as one of the leading countries in the Pacific region, offers a great potential to work closely with the EU in dealing with climate change, committing to low-carbon transition, renewable energy, and green transformation in terms of financing and development. Both the EU and Japan share the aim of becoming climate neutral by 2050 and have recently established a Green Alliance that aims to cooperate and to ensure the outcome of the COP26 conference in Glasgow. Nevertheless, there is much more to be done in the future, and the pathway for climate change cooperation seems to be a long way to go.

This year's third debate in a series of expert discussions on the EU relations with the Pacific took place online and was streamed on our Facebook page on Wednesday, December 1<sup>st</sup>. The discussants provided an interesting point of view on the current state of climate relations between Japan and the EU as well as on the challenges that are ahead of the Green Alliance. Later, the debate focused on the decarbonization initiatives especially on the question of decarbonizing heavy industries and what the countries can learn from each other. To conclude the debate, the speakers offered their perspectives on Japan's role at the COP26 conference as well as the future talks between the EU and Japan.

Assistant Professor and lecturer Yuka Kobayashi from the SOAS University of London provided a profound knowledge of the Japanese role in the economic partnership with the EU. For the Green Alliance, there is more continuity from both sides as well as more stability predictability considering both the EU and Japan are not driven by ego-based competition. According to Professor Yuka Kobayashi, the partnership is something worth investing in since there is potential in the future even in areas like third countries which depend on investments from Japan or China. Japan is "really bringing the brain open idea more into the foreign policies leaving the ego-based competition behind." In the case of decarbonizing initiatives she suggests that the companies should have more discussion about how to conceptualize combustion and they should shift to a "more global perspective rather than an industry-based." As a concluding remark, Professor Kobayashi indicates that even though a lot is going

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on for the Japan-EU partnership, it is still in its early days and Japan is going through a transition period at the moment, so there are a lot of background issues that are occupying the Japanese government.

Jennifer Tollmann, a Senior Policy Advisor from the E3G's Berlin office pointed out the importance of being able to rely on each other when it comes to climate neutrality and climate diplomacy and Japan is a close and honest partner to the EU that we can have realistic conversations with. Regarding the main challenges of the partnership, she poses a question on "whether our relationship is green enough or not." In this case, Jennifer Tollmann considers the fact that Japan, being the only G7 country that did not sign up to the international fossil fuel finance pledge at the COP26 is a bit problematic. The EU and Japan should unquestionably set certain limits about what can and cannot be done in the relationship. Tollmann suggests that hard and realistic conversations with the industries should be held when it comes to the industrial transition and decarbonization as well as Carbon capture and storage (CCS). All in all the EU and Japan are indeed crucial allies that share a lot of the challenges and opportunities and therefore should cooperate.

His Excellency Václav Bartuška, Ambassador-at-Large for Energy Security from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic drew more attention to the energy sector as well as energy transition where Japan is undoubtedly a natural partner to the EU since they both have a common interest in being less dependent on gas imports from other countries and unstable regions. As he mentions Japan and Europe will not discover any new oil reserves in the upcoming decades, therefore "we are basically destined to cooperate in many ways." According to H.E. Václav Bartuška, the area where both actors can cooperate more are the standards, e.g. hydrogen production or technology that should be used for that. Other areas and challenges that are interesting in the relationship are the way how we deal with data or how we fight for privacy and human dignity. Regarding the COP26, from the European perspective, the conference "was not a fiasco and there is a lot to think about." Overall, the EU and Japan are in many ways the same and destined to cooperate in moving away from fossil fuels.

"If you missed the debate and would like to hear more, you can watch the debate on the Facebook page of the EUROPEUM Institute for European Policy, which hosts the EU-Pacific Talks debate."

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## Contact

Web: [europeum.org](http://europeum.org)

Prague Office address: Staroměstské náměstí 4/1, 110 00, Praha 1

Tel.: +420 212 246 552

E-mail: [europeum@europeum.org](mailto:europeum@europeum.org)

**Brussels Office** address: 77, Avenue de la Toison d'Or. B-1060 Brusel, Belgie

Tel: +32 484 14 06 97

E-mail: [brussels@europeum.org](mailto:brussels@europeum.org)

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