

The Royal Institute of International Affairs of Belgium and the University of Essex organised a conference on ***EU-Japan Security Cooperation: trends and prospects*** at the Egmont Palace in Brussels on 7 March 2018.

As a consequence of the unfolding of important international events such as the escalation of the North Korean nuclear programme and the fallout from the “America First” policy adopted by President Trump, as well as the agreement of the EU-Japan Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) and the EU-Japan Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA) in 2017, interest in the subject of EU-Japan security cooperation has risen considerably. The one-day conference therefore came at an opportune time to review past, present and future developments of EU-Japan security cooperation.



In that context, the opening session of the conference was devoted to an assessment of the major aims and potential implications of the new EPA and the SPA. His Excellency, Mr Akira Kono, Ambassador, Japanese Mission to the EU, and Roland Honekamp, Desk Officer Japan - Political issues, European External Action Service (EEAS) provided two interesting and informative presentations on these developments, which were followed by a lively debate between around forty invited conference participants.

The second part of the conference consisted of a review of the findings of a two-year research project on twelve different security areas, taking a close look at the similarities and differences in the levels of threat perception, policy response and cooperation between the EU and Japan. The first of the three main sessions on research findings involved traditional areas of security, such as military and regional security. The other two sessions were concerned with non-traditional security sectors, such as cyber security, human security and climate change. The presentations and ensuing discussions in each of the three sessions provided rich insight into the degree of EU-Japan cooperation reached across the span of twelve security areas. A final session of the conference assessed the findings of the research project across the twelve security sectors, the reasons why some sectors have progressed more (e.g., economic security) than others (e.g., migration security), and the likely future developments in these sectors.

A smaller group of project researchers was subsequently invited to present the research findings in five specific research areas (military security, regional security, non-proliferation, climate change and energy security) to a group of officials of the EEAS, which resulted in fruitful exchanges.

As with the two previous workshops of the research project, the objective of the conference was not only to explore the extent to which the EU and Japan cooperate on a number of different security areas, it was also to reflect on how recent or contemporary internal (e.g., Brexit) and external developments (e.g., the North Korean missile launches) affect, or are likely to affect, the levels of cooperation between the two partners in the different security areas. Unsurprisingly, uncertainties surrounding the policy agenda of the United States’ President Trump became a prominent feature in the discussions.

We are enormously grateful to the Egmont Institute for offering its pleasant headquarters to host the event, and to the Erasmus-programme of the European Commission for financial support. Judging by the feedback from participants, the event can be deemed to have been interesting, rewarding and successful.

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