

Concluding remarks

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In recent years the European Union has experienced many big changes in political, economic and social dimensions; the Arab spring at first occurred in Tunisia in the end of 2010 and following influx of refugees from north Africa, serious events concerning Islamism in Norway or France, provoking discussions about immigrant policy and Schengen framework, and inside the EU Euro and financial crisis, bringing about changes of government in Italy, Spain, Greece and France.

In the circumstances, do EU countries maintain the Union itself as their top priority, or shut themselves in state sovereignty? And what change has been made in the European identity? It is often heard discussions on withdrawal of Greece and recently that of the UK where Prime minister Cameron showed his intention to do referendum soon after the next general election in 2015 asking whether the UK remains in the EU or not.

Then, we put focus in this workshop on especially the situation of the European identity in this context, on regarding impact by the Arab spring to the EU and roles of social media in the EU and influences of the changes around the Union to its external relations especially with the Mediterranean and also Japan.

1) Prof. Kolja Raube (University of Leuven) “From Crisis to Integration? – European Diversity and Identity, Transnationalism, and Institutional Change”

This is a sort of keynote speech for today’s workshop, supplying important views on essence and future of European integration. Here it is analysed how Europeans define today’s situation as starting-point for future integration rather than crisis; it does matter on one hand transnational interactions and interdependence and on the other diversity and difference embedded in a communicative linkage.

2) Prof. Saito Tsuyoshi (Kobe University) “Political Change in North Africa and Its Influence on Europe”

Prof. Saito, anthropologist specializing Moroccan culture and society, analysed how Arab spring has caused change of Europeans’ recognition about North Africa and through it their recognition about themselves; what is important is to reconsider the mode of configuration of collective identities having views on international, national and local contexts, especially the locality, a local identity based on ethnicity which has been marginalized politically. This seems to be a lesson both to North Africa and Europe as well to build and keep a stable and peaceful society established by a democratic way.

3) Prof. Murao Hajime (Kobe University) “Evaluating the City Characteristics through Geo-Tagged Tweets”

Prof. Murao’s contribution gave us a suggestion about how to investigate change of European identity through Twitter and/or other SNS. It seems to me interesting if we try to research on attitude of each national towards European crisis from inside and outside focusing on words such as “democracy”, “immigration”, “austerity” etc. Data on SNS may tell us what matters for Europeans

vis-à-vis crisis.

4) Prof. Noemi Lanna (Università degli Studi di Napoli L'Orientale) “What crisis? Japan, EU and Political Change in the Middle East and North Africa”

Prof. Lanna treats an overused word “crisis” critically and shows a need to consider it in a sense of a decisive judgement for the future. Here it refers in detail to Japanese and the European Union’s future identity. What do they want, what do they want to be? These are very important questions if we consider the EU’s identity and Japan-EU relations as well; and she suggests we have to recognize that MENA region where the Arab spring occurred and its consequences have been in progress are common and crucial both for the EU and Japan.

Through each presentation and discussion, we could recognize that vis-à-vis “crises” inside and outside in which direction the Europeans’ identity formation has developed and how Europe will be able to overcome the “crises” politically and socio-culturally.

To do that, the EU has to tackle the reality in North Africa from local point of view, that is to say it is necessary to relativize the Nation-State centered view, looking at local cultures, ethnicity and identities, and also rethink about dichotomy authoritarianism – democracy, religious – secular, and consider further the significance of emergence of coexistence religion (particularly Islam) – democracy. And a distribution of such kind of values in Europe geographically and/or socially (age, gender, etc. if possible) may produce a base of political culture and can function to establish a nation as socio-cultural foundation. So SNS can be used for the investigation of the value distribution that may function in European identity formation in such a changing environment.

In my view, it is important to distinguish value distribution in flow and stock. Data provided by SNS usage may be able to show the trend in society (i.e. flow), but also it is necessary to pay attention to culture and history as stock. Both of them must be indispensable to form one’s identity and to understand what is going in Europe actually.

And Japan-EU relations have become close in recent years in political and strategic perspectives and North Africa or MENA region is just the place where interests of both parties coincide. For Japan and the EU, changing situations in MENA region may be chances for the future for their cooperation, rather than crises.

From a point of view of political values, it may be useful to investigate Europeans’ eager attachment to values such as liberal democracy, rule of law and respect of human rights for their own society and also for neighbouring region, such as North Africa, so as to make clear how the EU will progress further or on the contrary stagnate inside each nation-state in this big changing situations, say “crises” by SNS ways and also humanities and social sciences' approach.