

August 2021

## The 29th German-Japanese Forum

Dear Chancellor Merkel,

Dear Prime Minister Suga,

The 29th German-Japanese Forum Joint Meeting was held on May 20th and 21st, 2021. The Covid-19 pandemic forced us to abandon the event in 2020 and eventually hold it online. However, despite the difficult circumstances, the meeting was a meaningful opportunity to exchange experiences, perspectives and ideas with each other. We would like to express our sincere gratitude to the German and Japanese governments for their generous support.

The outline of the discussions at our online conference and our recommendations to the German and Japanese governments are as follows.

We set three themes – (1) domestic challenges and political response in Germany and Japan, (2) the role Germany and Japan should play as democratic nations in strengthening the rules-based international order, and (3) urgent issues to address the turmoil surrounding Covid-19, lessons learned from the pandemic, prevention of possible future pandemics and possibilities for Germany and Japan to cooperate.

In the first session “Domestic Challenges and Political Response”, we discussed mainly how politics should face the rapid changes in the economic situation and public opinion brought about by Covid-19 and shared the view that the same three structural problems are revealed in Germany and Japan – **(a) delays in incorporating digital technology into government services and social infrastructure, (b) inadequate cooperation between the central government (federal government) and local governments (states or prefectures), (c) difficulties in persuasively incorporating the scientific knowledge of experts in various policies.** A large challenge was seen in improving crisis communication. Drawing up contingency plans may be helpful to allow democratic deliberations but at the same time to enable quick decisions and to provide clear orientation to the public in both Germany and Japan. In regard to (c) utilizing experts’ knowledge for policies, it was mentioned that a core organization which strongly leads policy formulation by

bundling expertise should be established especially in Japan, with reference to the CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) in the United States.

In the second session “Restart in the Relations with the US and German-Japanese Strategies in the Indo-Pacific”, we welcomed the revival of multilateralism and international cooperation policy in the United States. At the same time we shared concerns about the further growing influence of China's authoritarianism in the international community. **As countries that have prospered under democracy, Germany and Japan are in a position to actively contribute to the formation of an international order based on free trade, respect for human rights, and compliance with international rules.** From this point of view, **the strong cooperation between Germany and Japan should be clearly shown.** However, Germany and Japan both have a deep economic relationship with China, and China will continue to be an important partner for us in the future. In addition, China's cooperation is necessary for solving global issues such as environmental problems. Therefore, there was a consensus that **the goal of the German and Japanese strategies in the Indo-Pacific is not to exclude China, but to deepen relations with those Asian countries that share common values with us.**

In the third session “The Lessons of Corona”, members discussed perspectives on "global health" in particular. Regarding the urgent issue of an equitable supply of corona vaccines to all parts of the world, many commented that it is most important to promote the global distribution of vaccines by enhancing the functions of the WHO and the COVAX initiative, and that Germany and Japan should commit to it actively.

On the other hand, members of both countries showed their understanding of the justifiable opposition of the German and Japanese governments to invoking the IP waiver. **Both Japan and Germany have a strong basis of research and development in universities, research institutes and companies and a large number of leading pharmaceutical manufacturers, and in order to ensure that the incentives for new drug development continue to work effectively, including for the next generation of Covid-19 vaccines, it is of vital interest to protect their intellectual property rights. And for both Germany and Japan, deepening industry-academia collaboration in the fields of biotechnology and pharmaceuticals, linking them to rapid new drug development, can be an excellent approach to contribute to overcoming the global pandemic.**

In addition, as one of the preparations for a possible pandemic in the future, we shared the idea that **it is highly important to develop an international unified standard for infection status so that WHO can declare an emergency to all countries clearly and each country can quickly take initial actions.**

Forum members see an opportunity for Japan and Germany to cooperate in strengthening (and reforming) the WHO and related global health institutions, for example in the UN, to provide access to universal health care to people all over the world.

The 2022 G7, chaired by Germany, could be a good opportunity for Germany and Japan to launch initiatives to resolve these challenges.

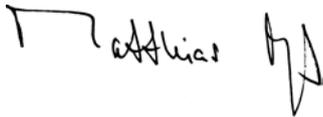
Another topic related to the lessons learned from the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and discussed by Forum members was digitization. One major challenge during the pandemic was the abrupt need to shift all communications to the digital sphere. Important challenges in the process of digitization are the inadequate network infrastructure in rural areas in both Germany and Japan and increasing vulnerabilities related to data protection due to the fact that many companies and data servers that provide digital communication services are located in countries with a more liberal regulatory framework.

**The potential of telemedicine** was also discussed from the viewpoints of both infection control measures and the effective use of digital technology. Since Covid-19 poses a high risk to elderly people, not only densely populated metropolitan areas but also rural areas with a high proportion of elderly and a relatively inadequate supply of medical services are disproportionately threatened by the virus. Reorganization of medical regulations and strong data protection are necessary, but a wide and well-equipped network of telemedical contact points will allow patients to get in contact with medical personnel in times of limited mobility, will improve the speed and quality of examinations and treatments in rural areas, and help greatly to prevent the spread of infections. **In the field of telemedicine as well, it is expected that Germany and Japan, which have strengths in medical equipment and robotics, will promote joint research and extended cooperation.** A specified forum for exchange could provide health care administrators in both countries with an opportunity to share experiences and best practices.

Through a series of discussions, we realized that the ongoing crisis caused by Covid-19 not only poses difficulties for the world, but also carries the seeds of innovation for industry, society and citizens' daily lives. We hope that Germany and Japan, working together and leveraging their knowledge and experience, will make significant contributions to worldwide innovations.

Please allow us to once again express our thanks for the support that you, Chancellor Merkel and Prime Minister Suga, have given the German-Japanese Forum. We greatly appreciate your interest in our work.

Respectfully yours,



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German Chairman



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