

The Republic of Korea and Tumen Area Cooperation

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Following the fourth TRADP meeting held June 1999 in Mongolia, I am very pleased to have the opportunity to discuss economic cooperation for Northeast Asian nations through the TRADP in this Forum. Ever since the concept of the TRADP was first raised at the initial Northeast Asia Economic Forum in 1990, the TRADP has contributed to the development of friendship and cooperation among the Northeast Asian nations. I believe it would be meaningful to look back upon the TRADP to examine how it has accomplished this momentous feat, at this wrap-up forum of the twentieth century.

When the TRADP was just being conceived as an idea, the dark shadow of the Cold War and its historical implications had not been fully lifted in this region. At that time skepticism abounded over how countries with such different political and economic systems could cooperate with one another. However, for the past eight years, the member nations have been actively participating in the Programme and complied with the intermediary efforts of the UNDP. We have been able to establish the committees whereby some cooperative results have been achieved by overcoming our historical differences.

The TRADP has not only been successful in implementing physical infrastructure such as roads, railroads, and harbors in the Tumen area, but has also built an institutional framework to expand human and material interchanges within this region.

The area dimension of the Programme has been changed. Originally, business efforts were concentrated on the regional development of the limited area called the “Golden Triangle” surrounding the Tumen River area. Today, the Programme has been expanded to cover the entire Northeast Asian region, including the Rajin-Sonbong Free Trade Zone of the DPRK, three Northeastern provinces of China, the Russian Far East, and Eastern Mongolia.

The development of the Tumen River area and the Northeast Asian region as a whole are correlated. The economic development of Northeast Asia as a whole could be achieved by developing the Tumen River area—connecting the rich resources found in this region to Korea, Japan, and the United States.

At this point in time, I can honestly say that the TRADP has not only contributed to regional development, but it has also contributed to the economic development of the entire Northeast Asian region, and furthermore to the increasingly positive relations and goodwill among member nations. The TRADP has advanced from merely a regional development project to a notable player in

promoting understanding and cooperation among the member nations of Northeast Asia.

It is true that the TRADP still faces some difficulties due to the regional limitations of the remote areas of the member nations/resulting in underdevelopment of infrastructure as well as insufficient investment sources. However, we are the ones that hold the key to solving these problems. If we could promote even friendlier political and economic relations among our member nations and reduce the possibilities of regional disputes, then who would hesitate to invest in this region with such considerable potential?

As mentioned in the previous TRADP meeting in Mongolia, we need to clarify the market-oriented reform reliance, show a willingness to be more open, bring the concerned laws and systems to the level of international standards, and provide human resource education along with the free exchange of information. This would benefit not only the Tumen River area, but it would also contribute to more rapid growth in the region's countries.

Signs of easing tensions in this region are more visible than ever. If the twentieth century in Northeast Asia has been described as "100 years of tension and ignorance," we must make strides to ensure that the twenty-first century will be known as "100 years of cooperation and prosperity."

Although the TRADP is not quite an integrated economic community, through its use of a mutually beneficial economic structure of this region, the TRADP can bring about a brighter future for the twenty-first century whereby the importance of regional cooperation will indeed be lofty. With the cooperative experiences gathered from the TRADP, I hope we can construct a close and future-oriented mutually beneficial relationship among the nations of Northeast Asia.