

Georgia Crisis Reveals Limits of the European Neighborhood Policy

by KOKUBO Yasuyuki

While the Beijing Olympics was in full swing, the Georgia Crisis broke out. This Crisis has got a potential to emerge as a serious international problem, as it opened up a Pandora's box of minority ethnic issues, which EU has tried so desperately to seal, and created tension between U.S. and Russia.

During the Cold War, former Eastern camp countries sealed off minority ethnic issues by force. When national liberation movements gained momentum with the end of the Cold War, Germany quite naively approved to recognize the independence of Slovenia and Croatia, without building a consensus with other EU member countries. This hasty move of German foreign policy made volatile the situation of the ethnic issues in the former Yugoslavia, thus triggered a series of conflicts in Bosnia and in Kosovo. EU countries had to turn to NATO (namely U.S.) to solve these conflicts in former Yugoslavia.

Since then, EU has conditioned, among others, sealing the ethnic issues in former Eastern camp countries (or protection of the rights of the ethnic minorities, ostensibly speaking) on their accession to EU or provision of development assistance by EU. Eastern countries, badly in need of economic aid from EU, had no choice but to accept that moral condition. Therefore, "carrot dangling" policy towards new accession states of EU was considered quite successful. Besides, EU started in 2003 the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) and has ever since promoted assistance to the neighboring countries for their stabilization and economic recovery.

However, the Georgia Crisis clearly shows that this "carrot dangling" policy has definite limits. Russia, on the other hand, is quite opposed to being treated equally with its neighbors and seeks another framework in its relations with EU. It is the sincere hope of the countries with minority ethnic issues to avoid the visits of the apparition called self-determination. I think Japan is morally obliged to join in international discussions over whether the rights of the ethnic minorities are duly protected, and engage proactively in building a framework for the protection of them, instead of merely advocating "peace-addicted self-determination."

(This is the English translation of an article written by Mr. KOKUBO Yasuyuki, Professor of University of Shizuoka, which originally appeared on the BBS "Giron-Hyakushutsu" of GFJ on August 22, 2008.)