

Meiji Institute for Global Affairs

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Short Curriculum Vitae) Naoaki Okabe

Graduated from the School of Political Science and Economics, Waseda University in 1969. Joined the *Nihon Keizai Shimbun* that same year, and after serving in roles such as reporter in the economics section held successive posts as a correspondent in Brussels, head of the New York branch office, executive director of the editorial board, special executive director, and columnist. Has held his current post since 2012. His major works have included *A Leaderless World*, *A Primer to the Japanese Economy*, and *Reciprocity: The Political Dynamics of the Yen and Dollar*.

Despite It All, the Forces Unifying the EU Are Growing Stronger

This July 1 Croatia newly joined the European Union (EU), which is supposedly still suffering from crisis. It has become the second country after Slovenia from among the former Yugoslavian countries, which have tread an arduous path that includes ethnic antagonism and the dissolution of their nation, to join the EU. With this the EU has expanded to 28 countries. What is more, in January 2014 Latvia, which is one of the three Baltic countries, decided that it would become the 18th country to join the euro. There are some who take an alarmist view that leaving economic disparities as they are when it comes to the expansion of the EU and the euro could potentially fan the flames of the crisis. Yet the fact of the matter is that such economic disparities have also served as a driving force for development. Even now unifying forces are at work on the EU, which continues to advance forward even as it is beset by structural contradictions.

The Country that Produced Tito

Croatia has two faces. Along its inland areas it has a long border with

Bosnia-Herzegovina that stretches on. Conversely, its western side is a beautiful tourist region facing the Adriatic Sea. The Brijuni Islands in particular are well known as sites of scenic beauty.

The holiday home of Josip Broz Tito, who unified Yugoslavia following World War II, was located here. I once visited this holiday home while I had a break from reporting on the OB Summit. There I glimpsed a gorgeous grand reception hall that served as the stage for a variety of international conferences, as well as a tiny room that stood in stark contrast to this. Many of the tools that Tito, who had been a machinist, acquired still remain here. It is said that even after he became president, Tito would occasionally hole himself up in this room and become engrossed in playing around on the machinery. Tito's origins as a fighter who opposed the Nazis and rose up to unify Yugoslavia are to be found in that house.

However, this great enterprise of national unification transcending ethnicity did not last forever. Following Tito's death in 1980 the bonds came undone and a period of national dissolution began. The mutual hatred between ethnic groups stretched back into the past, making it impossible to sever the chains of animosity.

Leaders from around the world gathered at Tito's funeral service, where active summit diplomacy unfolded. This came about out of respect for the leader who achieved the unification of Yugoslavia, and was also a presentiment of the era of turmoil that came about following Tito's death.

The Bonds of Music

The former Yugoslavian countries, which plunged into a period of crisis in anticipation of the turmoil that would follow Tito's death, still had the "bonds of music" to form emotional ties between the people. In 1980, the year of Tito's passing, a naturally gifted classical guitarist was raising her first cries as a mere baby in Croatia. Her name was Ana Vidović, who is still to this day one of the most-watched musicians in the world for her peerless musicianship and beauty.

She has deeply moved people across every genre, including classical music from the likes of Bach, Spanish songs by the likes of Tárrega, and music from Central and South America by Barrios and others. Where does such profound music that unites the stage and audience together as one come from? Therein lies a striking vividness that surpasses beauty. How was it that such natural genius was fostered in chaotic Croatia? Or was it by virtue of the fact that she was born and raised in Croatia that she was bestowed with such striking musical abilities? Vidović now resides in the United States and travels the globe to perform concerts, but she has said that she never parts with the books of Miroslav Krleža, the great Croatian-born author and poet.

Vidović has said that the first instrument she acquired at the age of five years old was one of the famed Masaru Kohno guitars from Japan that her elder brother had used. One cannot help but feel as if this is a curious coincidence.

It was a single Japanese person who joined the chaotic and antagonistic former Yugoslavian countries together with music: the musical conductor Toshio Yanagisawa. He took up the position of head conductor of the Kosovo Philharmonic Orchestra amidst the chaos, and in 2007 he established the Balkan Chamber Orchestra that strove to achieve the mutual prosperity of its ethnic groups and became its musical director. This Japanese person, who has taken it upon himself to serve as a mediator in a combat zone through music, has received praise and admiration from all over the world.

While his musical performances are by no means as polished as some of the leading orchestras in the world, under Yanagisawa's enthusiastic guidance the hearts of the orchestra members gradually came to resonate with people in a manner that transcends race. The sound is striking in exactly the same way as Vidović's guitar is. A film chronicle showing Yanagisawa's struggles (BS Japan = winner of the Broadcasting Cultural Award) is moving no matter how many times you watch it.

Perhaps it was by virtue of the fact that he was a Japanese person with no personal vested interests with any ethnic group that he was able to play such an enormous role in the ethnic reconciliation of the Balkans. Herein lies the latent potential that Japanese people can deliver among the global community. Japan can pride itself on having a

musician who has taken it upon himself to serve as a mediator in a combat zone while braving great danger.

Historical Role in Balkan Stability

“We’re at an historic moment for the Balkans and for Europe as a whole.” So said President Van Rompuy of the EU when he took part in the ceremony celebrating Croatia’s accession to the EU. The year 2014 is the 100-year anniversary of the Sarajevo Incident that triggered World War I. The Balkan Peninsula has truly been “Europe’s powder keg” stretching down all the way to the Yugoslav conflict at the end of the 20th century. For that reason alone Croatia’s joining the EU is enormously significant in that it will lead to the stability of the Balkan Peninsula.

Following Croatia, the fact that Serbia has allowed for accession negotiations with the EU also warrants attention. The geopolitical significance of adding it to the EU will be greater even than that of adding Croatia. If it can overcome its ethnic conflict and gain access to the shared arena that is the EU, then this would serve to fulfill the historical role of the EU as an alliance for peace. This could certainly be described as a qualitative integration that goes beyond the quantitative expansion of the EU that has been seen thus far.

Of course, there are numerous challenges that must be surmounted in order for Croatia to become established within the EU, and for it to take part in the euro. Kick-starting its tourism business would be a shortcut for this, but if it relies on this alone then sooner or later its economy will not be able to maintain itself. There are fears that the same problems would play out there as happened in Greece. For it to achieve a full-fledged revitalization of its economy it will most likely have to work on structural economic reforms, such as attracting foreign capital. It has the foundations of a manufacturing industry, and thus it has the latent potential to achieve economic development on par with that of other newly emerging countries by leveraging assets like the EU’s infrastructural support.

At first glance Croatia’s accession to the EU seems like a tiny step amidst the upheaval

of moving towards a greater Europe, but in light of the 100-year anniversary of the Sarajevo Incident Balkan stability truly represents an historical turning point. To this degree, it could be called a starting point for the European integration that has been achieved via the Second World War.