

FRS – Japan Program

Digitalization and cyber threat challenges to the industrial sector and society: change of nature or change of dimension?

Interview with Yasuo Tanabe



Yasuo Tanabe is Managing Director of the EU-Japan Centre for Industrial Cooperation, which is a joint venture between the Japanese government and the European Commission to promote economic exchanges (since July 2020). He has 32 years of government experience at the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), mostly specialized on trade and energy policy and negotiation. Thereafter, he has served in senior executive positions of Hitachi, Ltd. in charge of government and external relations for 9 years. He has a MA of International Relations from Stanford University and a BA of Law from University of Tokyo.

Question 1: What changes has the Covid-19 pandemics brought to the previous digitalization of societies? Would you say it is a change of nature related to massive data use and AI or a change of dimension?

Speed. Digitalization was steadily growing before, but the pandemic has accelerated it. Most importantly, users and citizens changed their mindset for working, consuming, playing, and other digitalized activities. Workers now do not need to go to company offices, telework is not yet the norm but it is much more prevalent, including in societies previously focused on physical presence at work. Citizens can now live their own lives with more time with their family, while working flexibly.

Digital service providers have taken advantage of this trend to upgrade their services, utilizing data, AI, IoT (internet of things), etc.

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Question 2: What would be Japan's solution for a more secure digital environment and are there specific challenges for Japanese entities?

Preparations and resilience are a vital necessity in this new period of increased digitalization. People and companies have to be trained to prepare for cyber attacks

and to perform better resilience in case of attacks. Japanese entities have unique challenges, because the Japanese society and industries have zero-defect culture and people tend to be more trustful. Japanese companies and individuals, however, will have to adjust to the global standard where there is an increased necessity to pay attention to security and adapt to the challenges of globalization.

Question 3: How do you evaluate the possibility of globalization of norms to improve digital security and safety?

This is one of Japan's important roles and responsibilities. Japan is promoting the idea of Society 5.0, in which digital technology and digitalization will be utilized to build a better society (more secure, sustainable and inclusive). This is a step above the concept of "Industry 4.0", which targets essentially industrial competitiveness. Japan, in partnership with friends and allies sharing the same values and objectives, should become a leader to promote new norms governing the global society. There are good chances for this to succeed, because there are many countries that do share the same objective and the same set of democratic liberal values.

Question 4: Is the question of "values" and of the nature of different political systems significant to build common "good practices"?

That is a challenge, but we have to find a good, balanced solution, because there are and will be different political systems in the world. Beyond completion between different value systems, we have to build up success cases one by one to manage the reality of global governance. One example would be the negotiation of rules for digital trade, called DFFT (data free

flow with trust), by 70+ members of WTO. This was an initiative launched at the Osaka G20 meeting in 2019 that received positive attention from countries with different political or ideological systems.

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