

Thank you, President Dasselbloom, for your lecture, which showed your deep understanding of the history of this university as well as Japan's culture and economy, and how Europe and Japan share goals. You have also given us a concise account of the policies and institutional reform in Europe since the crisis. As someone who compares Europe and Japan for a living, it was an especially encouraging speech, and I am very happy to be given the opportunity to comment.

I completely agree with the President that both Europe and Japan must ask Murakami's important question now, what matters most to us? We both must decide what to keep and what to give up, in order to attain sustainability; fiscal, demographic and environmental sustainability.

The President also pointed out some differences between the crisis in Japan and the EU. I would myself like to point out one big difference, which is that Japan has no Europe. Some in the Eurozone express displeasure about the fiscal consolidation and other reform measures supported by your recent governance overhaul. But I would say, if only Japan were so lucky! We do not have the Eurogroup or the EU to provide the framework and encouragement, and yes, sometimes the pressure, to press forward with the necessary reforms.

Such supra-national frameworks are very important for many reasons. But in the context of unpopular reforms, they are important to balance out the pressures of democracy, which can sometimes move the country in the wrong direction. I say this because this is what's happening in Japan.

As someone who has lived through two lost decades in Japan, I have now come to the conclusion that short-term recovery measures are not going to solve Japan's problems. Because our problem is one of sustainability, and unless the problem of sustainability is resolved, short-term recovery will also be constrained. The President talked about "connecting the policy strands". Surely the policy strands of the three arrows need to be connected in Japan, too. But there is a limit to what monetary and fiscal policy can do for sustainability.

It seems to me, what is stopping Japan from achieving sustainability is the way in which Japan's democracy is functioning at the moment. In Japan, people over 60 vote twice as frequently as people in their 20s. And you have to be 20, not 18, to vote in Japan.

On top of that, one in four Japanese is over 65 years old. And unfortunately, voters tend to vote for favours instead of policy, as revealed by recent election scandals. No wonder pension reform is slow, and nuclear power plants will be reopened in spite of polls showing high percentages of opposition.

But young people are the ones who will pay for the debt that is 240% of GDP. And young people are the ones who will suffer the low pension payments, and handle the nuclear waste. Japan needs to somehow find a way to reflect in policy the voices of the young, of future generations.

Otherwise, we will not be fiscally, demographically and environmentally sustainable. And we do not have a supra-national framework such as the EU, we need to achieve all this on our own.

But turning our eyes back to Europe, maybe Europe is not so different from Japan after all. Which brings me to my question to the President, what do you think is the role of democracy, what are the roles of political leaders and of voters, in maintaining sustainability in the Eurozone? Because implementation of EU decisions can be made difficult if not impossible if voters do not accept them. We are coming back to Murakami's choice, how much sovereignty are we asking these democratic countries to give up for sustainability.