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ABSTRACT OF PRESENTATION

The EU in the Eyes of Japanese Elites

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The objective of this presentation is to focus on the perception of the European Union (EU) among Japanese elites to show how Japanese elites perceive the EU. These perceptions were extracted from interviews conducted with 32 Japanese elite respondents over the period of May to October 2007. The interviews followed a semi-structured interview method, as it was considered the best way to better analyse interviewees' responses. This method involves using a basic questionnaire but leaves the interview open to additional questions to understand specific backgrounds and feelings of interviewees for certain questions.

This presentation assorts Japanese elites into four categories (political, business, civil society and media – 8 persons per category) and analyses the result of the interviews from five perspectives: general perceptions of the EU, international roles of the EU in the world, Japan-EU relations, specific issues, and sources of information on the EU.

The result of the interview clearly shows that Japanese elites perceive the EU positively and neutral, not negatively. However, the EU is of a lower profile in comparison with the United States and China.

More specifically, firstly, the general perceptions of the EU were varied. European politics and European integration were the most popular images among Japanese elites. Secondly, as regards the international roles of the EU, most Japanese elites considered the EU to be a great power and as a leader in some areas of international politics. In detail, most elites viewed the EU as an economic power and a normative power, but few

elites agreed that the EU is a military power. Thirdly, the perceptions on Japan-EU relations are examined. The majority of political elites, business elites and elites categorised into as belonging to civil society agreed that the EU would be more important in the future than at present, but media elites' attitudes were the contrary. From the viewpoint of comparing the EU with other countries and regions, most elites considered the United States and China to be much more important than the EU for Japan, although Russia was considered less significant than the EU. However, Japan-EU relations were viewed as stable with no serious issues. Fourthly, specific issues such as the enlargement of the EU, the euro and the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) were thought positively or of low profile. Fifthly, sources of information on the EU were mainly newspapers and other media outlets in Japanese.