



Sign in | [NE Careers](#) | [RSS Feeds](#) | [Partners](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [About NE](#)

Search: Search



THE EUROPEAN EMPLOYMENT FORUM
 22-23 Novembre 2011, Le SQUARE à Bruxelles
 CONFÉRENCE DE 2 JOURS TICKET €400 +TVA
 NOUVELLE APPROCHE: QUARTIERS NATIONAUX POUR LES EXPOSANTS

Home | e-Edition Library | Politics | Economy | EU Policy | Business | Energy | EU Institutions | EU World | EU Neighbourhood | Fashion | NETv

Fukushima clears East-West Divide?

Author: Ron Schiran
 17 April 2011 - Issue : 931

Gefällt mir Registrieren, um sehen zu können, was deinen Freunden gefällt.



Japanese Prime Minister Naoto Kan, (2-R), dressed in the blue work clothes, inspecting members of Tokyo Fire Department. EPA/PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICIAL RESIDENCE

In Sumo-wrestling, arguably the most Japanese of all sports, Japan is traditionally divided between the heavy fighters from the western and those from the eastern camp battling each other to the sandy ground.

More recently, another division within the country, between what they call Kansai and Kanto is bringing its energy-hungry industries close to the ground. The triple disaster of earthquake, tsunami and nuclear near-meltdown hit the Kanto and its northern region hard, and rolling blackouts might return, if not even worsen during the peak of the coming summer heat in energy consumption. Tokyo expects a dark and hot summer with less flashy and colourful lights on the streets and less cool air from the "air-con" in the shiny buildings not only in the capital's high-life district of Ginza.

In Sumo, often the winning wrestler graciously helps the losing underling to get up back on his feet, but the all admired Japanese solidarity is at vain when Kansai would like to provide electricity to Kanto. They simply cannot help their Eastern countrymen. Electric energy just cannot flow from Osaka --or Chubu in the middle-- to Tokyo, even not within the same company from a branch in the West to any in the east, in a country where --like the tight bonds in the family-- the highest level of solidarity still exists within its firms. The reason is Japan's division into two incompatible electric power grids, since Siemens introduced a system of 50 Hertz in Kanto and the Americans a different level in the other region of Nippon. In the EU in the meantime, we debate the issue if Germany should continue importing electricity from perhaps unsafe nuclear plants in France, while it exports surplus renewable energy generated by wind power to neighbouring countries like the Netherlands and Poland. The next step in integration here should be the EU smart grid, in particular for the abundant solar energy from the Sahara, also helping local economies of the 'Arab spring'.

However, within Japan --still for basically technical reasons--even in the current case of urgent need the Tokyo Electric Power Plant Company (TEPCO) and their clients simply cannot be helped with electricity from undamaged energy producers in the west of the country. And anyway, the industry had a difficult start from the start with their nuclear power. In view of the unprecedented exposure to the devastating American atomic bombs over Hiroshima and Nagasaki nuclear power obviously was very unpopular amongst the people of Japan after the 2nd World War.

Thus, in order to overcome the lack of own energy resources in the country itself and to power its growing energy-hungry industry, the government in collusion with business ('Japan Inc. '), introduced nuclear fission to fill the gap, albeit without much transparency and enlightenment of the averse public about its risks, notably after the shock of the Oil-Crises in the 70s. Amongst the Japanese people in general there was little discussion and understanding of the long-term consequences of the production of nuclear energy and it hardly ever



zalando
 Jetzt!
 Kostenloser Versand!

03 NETWORKING DAYS
16 WORKSHOPS
14 ONE-2-ONE MEETINGS

Subscribe to the NE newsletter



Interviews **Content Browser**

Andy Carling
 'EU will be stronger with Ukraine'

Select a Column
 Select Policy
 Select Country
 Select an Industry
 Select a Blog

New Europe
 NE Digital Archive
 New Europe TV

Information
 About us
 Contact us
 Terms and conditions
 Privacy policy

Partners

Contributions

became a political issue, even when various accidents in the plants occurred and the industry could not always cover up. But the single-mindedly protective journalists in the exclusive 'Kisha-clubs' with unique insider-knowledge managed to play down the accidents, and the domestic media created sort of another national taboo, next to the politics of the "Yakuza" (the domestic Mafia who actually were amongst the first to help after the earthquakes not only 1995 in their home-town Kobe and in that way gained popular appreciation!).

This clandestine fashion of dealing with the nuclear issue also never allowed any green opposition movement to grow into a political party like in Germany (now with up to 28% support) or France and in the European Parliament. Even any occasionally forming anti-atomic NGO would have no chance against the over-mighty industry lobby and would be tightly controlled by the mighty Finance Ministry, already on tax grounds.

Therefore, TEPCO and its western brethren in Japan easily grew rich, spread its plants along the coastline and eventually also succeeded at the stock exchange, until 11 March 2011...

The Japanese --living at the fault-line of major continental plates-- have millennia of experience with earthquakes and tsunami, as the big waves are called in their own language. Japanologists attribute the islanders' often-admired group-orientation and burden-sharing not only to the uniting rice-culture (in contrast to an individual hunter's life pattern), but also to the frequent common exposure to quakes and big waves. Together with the experience of volcano outbreaks and harsh seasonal changes, this geological particularity of "fudo" has added to their self-esteem as a 'unique' race on the archipelago. Banning contacts with the outside world over centuries until the mid 19th century to fend off foreigners by self-isolation ("sakoku") and cycles of nationalism since then have further contributed to their perceived otherness in homogeneity. It recently has culminated in the home-grown discussion amongst bureaucrats and business of the Japanese 'Galapagos Syndrome', which indicates particular domestic standards hindering internationalisation and thus exports, notably of mobile phones, and now seems to become a proud domestic brand name amongst them.

However, the risk of radioactivity from nuclear fission has nothing to do with a particular national culture. Also in Europe the issue of risks from splitting of atoms became hardly known among the wider public before the middle of the last century. Radioactivity cannot be seen, heard, nor smelt, but physically felt often only after years of its contamination. We all worldwide, as energy-consumers as well as voting citizens, depend on the authorities and knowledgeable media for expertise and enlightenment with more transparency also in decision-making.

Earthquakes and tsunami might calm down faster with increasing distance from their epicentres, and because of their frequent history there these natural phenomena have taught the Japanese already to deal with them better than other peoples. However, radioactive clouds travelling west from atomic meltdowns in Chernobyl or east from Fukushima reach us unhindered days later in Bruxelles. Their potential man-made 'epicentres' are all over the globe, particularly in Europe, America and Asia. (Wo)men everywhere could and should limit their global risks at least by global standards, as the affected environment is a global public good and everybody is concerned wherever around the globe.

Isn't it odd in our globalising world that the government of Japan --with its insular 'Galapagos Syndrome'-- as a consequence of the Fukushima disaster had still to set a standard for the maximum level of radioactivity of fish for human consumption? Free flying clouds and ocean-wide swimming fish perhaps are among the most global phenomena, let's deal with them globally and omnilaterally. Japan is an island country, but it is not at all isolated and alone on the issue of nuclear risk and we all should share this burden.

Ron Schiran is an expert on EU-Asia relations

Material: [Sarcastic Japanese are joking to leave Tokyo only when their Emperor goes back to his Old Palace in Kyoto... Chernobyl maximum level 7 of alarm was announced only more than a month after accident in Fukushima (by coincidence?) Boss of most powerful Yakuza gang Yamaguchi was released (Le Monde 12.4.2011)

Like

Add New Comment

Jaswant Singh
Asia's BRICs hit the wall



Ioannis A. Tsoukalas
Towards a cohesive European rare-earth elements strategy



Thomas Hammarberg,
Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights
Homophobic and transphobic violence must be stopped



Robert J. Shapiro
The real dangers from the new austerity



Frank Jensen
Europe's big cities kick-starting green growth



Neil Datta
An appeal to the EU on World Population Day



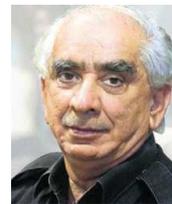
Robert Shapiro
Globalisation 2.0 and the rise of the rest



Jaswant Singh
The end of liberal interventionism

Type your comment here.

Post as ...



Showing 0 comments

Sort by

 [Subscribe by email](#)

 [Subscribe by RSS](#)

Reactions



treeolf 3 months ago

 From [Twitter](#)

Fukushima clears the East -West divide ? New Europe <http://bit.ly/eRrcSV>



greenenergytime 3 months ago

 From [Twitter](#)

Fukushima clears East-West Divide?: In the EU in the meantime, we debate the issue if Germany should continue im... <http://bit.ly/fr1lIQ>



greenenergytime 3 months ago

 From [Twitter](#)

Fukushima clears East-West Divide?: In the EU in the meantime, we debate the issue if Germany should continue im... <http://bit.ly/i5q3mD>



wisepowersystem 3 months ago

 From [Twitter](#)

Fukushima clears East-West Divide? <http://bit.ly/hbgx5E>

Trackback URL

blog comments powered by [DISQUS](#)