



Editorial | A New Japan-U.K. Trade Pact is Crucial for Bolstering Ties and Spreading 'Freedom'

In recent talks on a new bilateral trade agreement, Japanese Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi and British Secretary of State for International Trade Liz Truss reportedly achieved substantial progress regarding most key areas. They are now aiming to hash out the details and reach broad agreement by the end of August, with the new pact to take effect from January 2021.

The novel coronavirus pandemic has brought into stark relief the fragility of the global economy, amidst considerable concern about the rekindling of protectionism. It is therefore highly significant that in these trying circumstances, Japan and the U.K. are both determined to promote free trade by producing a new bilateral agreement.

At the same time, the new agreement will hopefully serve as the cornerstone for enhanced bilateral ties in various areas besides economics, including diplomacy and national security.

As the U.K. exits the European Union (EU), there are concerns that preferential treatment on things such as tariffs under the Japan-EU Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) will no longer apply to the U.K. after the end of this calendar year. The sense of urgency is said to be what drove Japanese and British negotiators to proceed with exceptional speed after talks commenced in June.

Many Japanese companies have established operations in the United Kingdom. If the current trade agreement no longer applies, that would result in a precipitous rise in tariffs on both sides. The damage caused by the coronavirus to businesses in both nations is yet an additional huge incentive to avoid such chaos at all costs.

The Japan-EU EPA has served as the basis for the trade negotiations between Tokyo and London. Key issues include how to handle the motor vehicle sector in which Japan is strong, and British farm exports to Japan. Negotiators hope to finalize agreement on agricultural products and other issues by the end of August.

One notable aspect of the emerging agreement is that rules governing the digital sector are more advanced than under the existing EPA. A new clause has been added to prohibit governments from forcing disclosure requirements on companies. This move would appear to be aimed at countering the digital protectionism being pursued by China as it strengthens State intervention and control of this vital sector.

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We should view the current talks as an opportunity to enlist the United States and EU in a joint effort in this regard by making this Japan-U.K. rule the international standard.

The British are now considering the possibility of going beyond a bilateral agreement with Japan by joining the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPP). Should the U.K. join this free trade arrangement, Japan would be able to avail itself of a geographically expanded market economy zone. This is obviously something that Japan should push for.

The United Kingdom has already reversed its previous conciliatory policy toward China because of distrust towards Beijing caused by the Chinese government's response to the coronavirus outbreak and the Hong Kong issue.

If Japan and the United Kingdom, as advanced countries sharing values such as freedom and democracy, can now strengthen ties so as to check China's demands stemming from its quest for economic and military hegemony, it would be all to the better.

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【主張】日英新貿易協定、連携強め「自由」を広げよ

茂木敏充外相と英国のトラス国際貿易相が日英間の新たな貿易協定について協議し、大半の交渉分野で実質合意した。8月末までに詳細を詰めて大筋合意し、来年1月の発効を目指すことでも一致した。

新型コロナウイルス禍でグローバル経済の脆弱（ぜいじゃく）性が露呈し、保護主義の再燃が懸念されている。その中で日英両国が自由貿易を推進する新協定で足並みをそろえた意義は大きい。

同時に、これを日英関係の礎とし、経済のみならず、外交や安全保障を含めたあらゆる面で、関係を強化することが望ましい。

英国の欧州連合（EU）離脱により、日EU経済連携協定（EPA）で英国に適用されていた関税などの優遇措置が今年末で効力を失うことが懸念されていた。両政府が6月の交渉開始後、異例の早さで発効の道筋をつけたのも、この危機感があったためである。

英国に進出している日本企業は多い。貿易協定がなくなり、双方で関税が急激に上がるという混乱を回避するめどが見ついたのは、コロナ禍で苦境に立つ両国の企業にとって重要な前進である。

日英の交渉は日EUのEPAを土台として行われた。特に日本が強みを持つ自動車や、英国が日本に輸出する農産品の取り扱いなどが論点となった。8月末までに農産品などで詰めの交渉を行う。

注目したいのは、デジタル分野を日EUの協定より先進的なルールとしたことである。政府による企業への開示要求を禁じる対象に新たな項目を盛り込む。この分野で国家の介入や管理を強める中国のデジタル保護主義に対抗する狙いがあるのだろう。これを機に米国やEUとも連携し、日英の規定を国際標準にしたい。

英国は、日本との2国間協定だけでなく、環太平洋戦略的経済連携協定（TPP）への加盟も検討している。英国が加われば、日本がTPPで追求してきた自由で開かれた市場経済圏が地域的な広がりを持つ。日本が積極的に後押しすべきは当然である。

コロナ禍の初期対応や香港問題をめぐる対中不信で、英国はかつての親中路線を大きく転換している。自由や民主主義などの価値を共有する先進国として、日英が関係を強めることは、中国による経済、軍事の覇権追求を牽制（けんせい）するためにも有益である。

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