Regionalism in the Age of Asia
By Dr. Kim Dae-jung

The 21st Century is an age where globalization and regionalism both coexist and compete with each other. Though the tide of globalization is strong, there is also a countervailing need for regionalism.

Globalization can only succeed on the basis of healthy regionalization.

IN THIS RESPECT, Asia’s rise is highly significant. The region is emerging as the epicenter of the world, not only in terms of history and culture, but also in its economic growth potential and position in international politics. As the world shifts from an age where Asia was observed only from the perspective of Western society to an age where Asia meets the rest of the world from its own perspective, we are witnessing a future in which Asia will be further integrated and become truly globalized. The world is shifting from an age that was long centered on the West to a new age centering on Asia.

The task entrusted to us in this “Age of Asia” is to expand democracy and promote peace, to contribute to the welfare of humanity and global stability. In Asia, there are still countries where democracy and human rights are under threat and where the shadows of the Cold War linger, such as on the Korean Peninsula. There are still places where poverty threatens human dignity and human security. Without strengthening democracy and eradicating poverty, we cannot expect to have peace. These tasks cannot be resolved without dialogue and cooperation within and among regions. Efforts to establish an East Asian community, such as the East Asia Forum (EAF) and the East Asia Summit (EAS), are all responses to the challenges of this new age.

It is true, however, that despite its vast potential and real capabilities, Asia currently lacks the kind of solidarity that one sees manifested in the European Union and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). It is also true that a huge gap exists between some Asian countries in terms of development and competitiveness. Therefore, Asia should, on the one hand, work for balanced benefits and development among its countries and, on the other hand, prepare for cooperation and competition with other leading regional communities.

At the ASEAN Plus Three Summit held in Vietnam in November 1998, I raised the need for an East Asian community and proposed the establishment of the East Asian Vision Group (EAVG) to pursue this goal. I believed that East Asia was unable to mount an effective collective response when the 1997 financial crisis simultaneously devastated several economies, because there was not yet an organization for regional economic cooperation – despite the fact that the world was becoming more integrated with the emergence of the World Trade Organization (WTO).

In October 1999, the EAVG was launched in Seoul with the countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), plus Korea, China and Japan, along with representatives from business and academia. The aim was to promote regional trade and investment, and strengthen cooperation in industries and national resources. The EAVG met five times between its founding and May 2001, and issued a report on the basic direction and mid- to long-term vision of cooperation in six sectors: the economy; finance; politics and security; environment and energy; society, culture and education; and institutions. The EAVG suggested that the ASEAN Plus Three Summit be developed into the East Asia Sum-

As the example of the European Union has shown, Asia will eventually take the same course of integration.
The 21st Century is an age where globalization and regionalism both coexist and compete with each other. Though the tide of globalization is strong, there is also a countervailing need for regionalism.

Globalization can only succeed on the basis of healthy regionalization.

Regionalism in the Age of Asia
By Dr. Kim Dae-jung

As the example of the European Union has shown, Asia will eventually take the same course of integration.

IN THIS RESPECT, Asia’s rise is highly significant. The region is emerging as the epicenter of the world, not only in terms of history and culture, but also in its economic growth potential and position in international politics. As the world shifts from an age where Asia was observed only from the perspective of Western society to an age where Asia meets the rest of the world from its own perspective, we are witnessing a future in which Asia will be further integrated and become truly globalized. The world is shifting from an age that was long centered on the West to a new age centering on Asia.

The task entrusted to us in this “Age of Asia” is to expand democracy and promote peace, to contribute to the welfare of humanity and global stability. In Asia, there are still countries where democracy and human rights are under threat and where the shadows of the Cold War linger, such as on the Korean Peninsula. There are still places where poverty threatens human dignity and human security. Without strengthening democracy and eradicating poverty, we cannot expect to have peace. These tasks cannot be resolved without dialogue and cooperation within and among regions. Efforts to establish an East Asian community, such as the East Asia Forum (EAF) and the East Asia Summit (EAS), are all responses to the challenges of this new age.

It is true, however, that despite its vast potential and real capabilities, Asia currently lacks the kind of solidarity that one sees manifested in the European Union and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). It is also true that a huge gap exists between some Asian countries in terms of development and competitiveness. Therefore, Asia should, on the one hand, work for balanced benefits and development among its countries and, on the other hand, prepare for cooperation and competition with other leading regional communities.

At the ASEAN Plus Three Summit held in Vietnam in November 1998, I raised the need for an East Asian community and proposed the establishment of the East Asian Vision Group (EAVG) to pursue this goal. I believed that East Asia was unable to mount an effective collective response when the 1997 financial crisis simultaneously devastated several economies, because there was not yet an organization for regional economic cooperation—despite the fact that the world was becoming more integrated with the emergence of the World Trade Organization (WTO).

In October 1999, the EAVG was launched in Seoul with the countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), plus Korea, China and Japan, along with representatives from business and academia. The aim was to promote regional trade and investment, and strengthen cooperation in industries and national resources. The EAVG met five times between its founding and May 2001, and issued a report on the basic direction and mid- to long-term vision of cooperation in six sectors: the economy; finance; politics and security; environment and energy; society, culture and education; and institutions. The EAVG suggested that the ASEAN Plus Three Summit be developed into the East Asia Sum-
Without strengthening democracy and eradicating poverty, we cannot expect to have peace.

ough inspections. In return, the United States should provide security assurances and lift economic sanctions on the North Korean economy. This can be realized through an improvement in U.S.-North Korean relations and a resumption of the Six-Party Talks and their real success. The issue of the Korean Peninsula goes beyond inter-Korean relations. It is an issue that concerns the whole of Asia and the world. Moreover, peace on the Peninsula is not just limited to the military level, but directly linked to economic prosperity, human rights and democracy.

Back in 1971, when I was the main opposition party’s presidential candidate, I proposed that the four surrounding powers – the U.S., Soviet Union, China and Japan – should guarantee peace on the Korean Peninsula. My suggestion was to encourage the four powers to deter any chance of war and guarantee security. It was a realistic goal that sought not only to end the state of war, but also to eliminate the undemocratic structure of South Korean society at the time, because Cold War logic and the inter-Korean confrontation justified the existence of an authoritarian dictatorship.

The members of the current Six-Party Talks are the same four powers that I proposed at that time, plus the two Koreas. I believe the Six-Party framework should not restrict itself to being just a temporary meeting to resolve the North Korean nuclear issue. I believe it should develop into a permanent multilateral organization for the promotion of peace and democracy on the Korean Peninsula and in East Asia. Such an idea was reflected in the “Gwangju Declaration” announced on June 17, 2006 as a result of the 2006 Gwangju Summit of Nobel Peace Laureates held in Gwangju June 15-17. Significantly, the summit was held on the occasion of the sixth anniversary of the June 15 South-North Joint Declaration. The Nobel Peace Prize winning individuals and organizations that participated came to a consensus on the issues of democracy, human rights, poverty reduction, and peace in Asia. Their agreement was reflected in the Declaration.

There is no reason to be pessimistic about the future of democracy and peace in Asia and the establishment of an East Asian community. Though many obstacles still exist, efforts from each country will help brighten the future of Asia. This is a region rich in diversity and high standards of culture; it is a vast area where the experiences of self-achieved, successful democratization are spreading; and where the development of information technology and common economic benefits are helping to hasten the integration of Asia and bring lasting peace. East Asia can also be a shining example for the rest of the world as a place where various great religions and cultures – Confucianism, Buddhism, Catholicism, Protestantism and Islam – coexist and cooperate.

In light of the clash of civilizations happening in other parts of the world, this remains a source of great hope for Asian integration.

Dr. Kim Dae-jung is the former President of the Republic of Korea and 2000 Nobel peace laureate.

In 1991, after the failure of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) to come up with a better international trading regime, Malaysia suggested the formation of an East Asia Economic Group (EAEG).

The members of this group would be the countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the three Northeast Asian countries – namely, Japan, South Korea and China.

Although Malaysia never clarified what the Group was all about, we had in mind only a forum at the level of heads of governments, where common economic and trading problems could be discussed and resolved or a common stand decided for the Group when discussing international trade regimes with other regions. Of course, we knew this proposal could be modified when ASEAN meetings considered it.

We felt such an East Asian group was necessary because the smaller countries of Southeast Asia, even when we acted as the ASEAN Group, were no match for the European Union and the countries of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) when negotiating trade and other economic matters. Together with the three Northeast Asian countries, however, the small economies of Southeast Asia would have sufficient clout to get a fair deal from Europe and North America.

But for reasons we could not understand, the U.S. objected strongly to the EAEG. James Baker, who was then the U.S. Secretary of State, visited South Korea and Japan and told them not to have anything to do with the proposal. Certain ASEAN countries were also advised not to support EAEG. It would seem in the U.S. view that while European countries could get together, and Canada, the U.S. and Mexico could form NAFTA, East Asian countries were not even to be allowed to talk to each other.

What is the difference between these Asian countries and the countries of Europe and North America? One does not like to accuse anyone of