

Organizer's Greetings

The annual “Northeast Asia International Conference for Economic Development (NICE) in Niigata” and the “Japan-Russia Energy and Environment Dialogue in Niigata” were scheduled to be held in tandem in February last year. However, owing to the initial spread of the novel coronavirus, we made a painful decision to postpone both events. Despite the continued presence of the virus this year, we have decided to hold NICE and the Japan-Russia Energy and Environment Dialogue thanks to a newfound method of delivery. Last year, the two events were to be convened on consecutive days at Toki Messe (Niigata City), but given the virus situation, we will divide them into four stages arranged over four days, delivered mainly online from January to March.

This year NICE will be opened for the 29th time, inclusive of its predecessors, the “Northeast Asia Economic Conference” (1996-2006) and the “International Forum on the Japan Sea Rim Region” (1990-95). We will celebrate the 12th installment of the Japan-Russia Energy and Environment Dialogue, which was inaugurated in 2008. By holding the two events together in four stages, we strongly believe that integrated discussions can be made on economic, energy and environmental issues from the perspective of sustainable economic development.

ERINA, in conjunction with Niigata Prefecture and the City of Niigata, has proudly been engaged in the management of NICE and the Japan-Russia Energy and Environment Dialogue. Founded in 1993, ERINA has been in operation for 28 years. In an effort to support economic development and regional economic cooperation in Northeast Asia, we have conducted research on economic trends and foreign economic relations in each country, facilitated economic and business exchanges and cooperation in the region, and disseminated economic and business information to the outside world. Expressly, we focus on Northeast China, the Far East region of Russia, the ROK, the DPRK and Mongolia, concentrating on such areas as economic interdependence among Japan and these countries and regions, international transport and logistics, trade and investment, energy and the environment, development finance, and people-to-people exchanges. As a means to contribute to the strengthening of the economic foundations for peace, stability, and

prosperity within Northeast Asia, we will continue to identify key issues for research and business exchanges, pursue solutions, and make policy proposals as a "Think and Do Tank."

This year's NICE will highlight the implications of a rapidly rising China and examine economic cooperation in Northeast Asia, while recognizing the economic effects of the spread of COVID-19 and the transformation of global supply chains. The Japan-Russia Energy and Environment Dialogue will focus not only on Japan and Russia, but also on China-Russia energy cooperation as well as energy-saving and environmental cooperation in Northeast Asia. Specifically, just as Japan's Suga administration has set a goal of achieving net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, and the new Biden administration in the United States is returning as a signatory to the Paris Agreement, a more serious response to climate change is expected in the near future.

As has been mentioned above, this year's event will be divided into four stages, with the first three stages online (web delivery) and the final stage combining offline (Toki Messe) and online (web delivery). As each stage can be viewed online, participation is possible from anywhere in the world. During each stage, a keynote speech by a distinguished expert in each field will be followed by reports by top policymakers, researchers and private sector experts and active discussions among them and with the audience. In the final stage, Mr. TERASHIMA Jitsuro, Chairman of the Japan Research Institute, will give a special address titled the "Strategic Response to Asian Dynamism", after which a summary of the first three stages will be provided, and presentations and a review of the Future Leaders Program will be held.

For the second time, the Future Leaders Program will invite undergraduate and graduate students who are based in prefectures that contribute to ERINA (11 prefectures in Chubu, Tohoku, and Kanto, including Niigata Prefecture) and share an interest in Northeast Asia to explore deeply the "Future Scenario of Northeast Asia" and provide various recommendations for action. The five groups or individuals who stood out during preliminary screening will compete by way of oral presentations, with the best group/individual to receive the Niigata Prefectural Governor's Award. In such an event, we hope to see the younger generation rise

and become future leaders on issues concerning Northeast Asia. Hereafter, we intend to widen the scope of the Future Leaders Program to encompass universities throughout Japan and the Northeast Asian region.

Through this year's NICE and Japan-Russia Energy and Environment Dialogue, as well as the Future Leaders Program, we expect that our awareness of the diverse challenges facing the Northeast Asian region, including health and contagious diseases such as COVID-19, the expanding Chinese economy, US-China conflict, energy and the environment, trade, investment and supply chains, and international logistics, will be shared by all participants. Moreover, we anticipate to identify the direction and action of multifaceted and realistic economic cooperation to solve such issues. Attention is also given to the activities of the younger generation. As always, we encourage lively discussions in NICE and the Japan-Russia Energy and Environment Dialogue to ensure maximum benefit for all participants.

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