

Report of the Council for the Relocation of the Diet and Other Organizations

December 20, 1999

Chapter 4: Significance and Effects of the Relocation of Capital Functions

1. Significance and effects of the relocation of capital functions

In parallel with the process of selecting candidate sites, the Council reviewed the Investigating Committee Report to conduct further inquiries and deliberations on the significance and effects of the relocation of capital functions. The long-term significance and effects of the relocation of capital functions are discussed below.

(1) Overall reform of government

The overall reform of the government has just begun. An effective stimulus is needed to accelerate the reform process. The relocation of the capital functions would serve as an effective stimulus for promoting the review of the nation's government in its entirety by extending the target of the investigation to the roots from which the present government grew. The relocation of the capital functions would be combined with other reforms into a comprehensive program for simultaneous implementation, and so the processes for reforms would be accelerated and lead to their satisfactory implementation. The result would be to produce more efficient administrative organizations and to help the nation achieve substantial decentralization. The relocation of the capital functions would separate the center of political activities from the center of economic activities, thereby giving birth to a set of new relationships among politicians, bureaucrats, and the people. Another effect of relocation is the building of a nation-wide information network that interconnects central and local government offices. This information network would help the government develop policies in the true interest of the people.

(2) Alleviation of excessive concentration of activities in Tokyo

Population concentration in the Tokyo area has temporarily lessened during the recent period of economic recession. Nevertheless, the concentration of the functions and information in the area is still inordinate. No significant changes have been made to these trends toward excessive concentrations of activities in Tokyo and to the extreme overcrowding there. If only the crowded commuter trains and the frequent traffic jams

were taken as examples, the pains caused by these are far beyond tolerable in most societies. If the relocation of the capital functions is combined with overall government reforms, people would be able to free themselves from the obsession that Tokyo is at the top of the hierarchy that governs all that exists in the nation. At the same time, local communities would become more aware of the importance of self-support and would be likely to develop and nurture their own cultures. Companies would no longer be unwilling to locate their home offices outside the Tokyo area. Once Tokyo is freed of its functions as the capital, it would revive as an active, but calmer, city of business and culture. The new Tokyo would continue to be an international cosmopolitan city with even more splendor than it has now.

(3) Strengthening disaster preparedness capabilities

If a major earthquake were to occur in Tokyo, it would cause a tremendous disaster because of its excessive concentration of activities. It would also cause the cessation of core functions all over the country, resulting in a crisis so serious that it would affect not only Japan, but also countries outside Japan. At present, the central government in Tokyo could not properly function as a control tower for managing the crisis. It is said that the personnel of the government would not even be able to get to their offices for work if such an emergency occurred. The relocation of capital functions would eliminate the possibility of simultaneous damage to all the nations' centers, including those for politics, governmental administration, business, and culture. If the control tower function that should work in the event of disaster were to be relocated to a site that is immune to major disasters, Japan's disaster preparedness capabilities would be considerably strengthened. In addition, Tokyo would be able to improve its own disaster preparedness capabilities by drawing up an appropriate plan for utilizing the areas that are now occupied for capital functions. Even if a disaster were to occur in Tokyo, the extent of damage would be greatly reduced.

(4) Miscellaneous considerations

Some Council members stated that selecting candidate sites at this point is premature because the discussions held thus far are still inadequate. However, as a whole, the Council concluded that it had the responsibility of presenting this report as specified by the Relocation Act, expecting that the report would further expand discussions of the subject.

2. Considerations to be made after presentation of the report

The Relocation Act states that further study should be conducted on relocation after the release of the report, through comparison of Tokyo and the candidate sites, and while considering the public's views on the relocation as well as social and economic conditions (Article 22). After the Council presents its report, these subjects should be considered by the Diet when it makes a final decision. However, since certain subjects are deeply related to the significance and effects of the relocation of the capital functions, the Council decided to include a summary of the subjects.

(1) Status of agreement among the people on the relocation

According to the polls conducted by several organizations and the public hearings held by the Council, the number of citizens that approve of the relocation is generally higher than the number not approving of it in most areas of the country. A recent questionnaire addressed to the people of Tokyo, however, found that the number of responses not approving of the relocation to be much higher. In spite of the polls, public hearings, and questionnaire, the report of the Council clearly states specific candidate sites. The report will certainly provoke discussions of the relocation of capital functions to a level extending to practical and specific details. These discussions will lead to people's recognition that relocation will no longer be a far-off dream, but an ambitious plan useful for the future of Japan. Understanding that the relocation is an extremely important project that would not be a simple undertaking, but that would continue for many years, the Council hopes that each and every citizen will gain an understanding of the significance of the project and be eager to participate in its support.

(2) Social and economic conditions

Some people have remarked that such a project should only be approved when the nation's economy is good and should not be promoted at present. However, the relocation of the capital functions must be considered from a long-term view as the country's century-long program. This is a high-quality program that would contribute to the creation of Japan's future and play a leading role in affecting extensive areas of Japan. Considering the present trends of a lower birthrate and an aging society, the project should be implemented while the nation can afford the necessary investment.

The Council calculated the reasonable cost of the relocation. The calculation showed that the public expense prior to the relocation of the Diet would average two hundred and fifty billion yen per year for ten years, that is, about 2% of the nation's budget for public works. When implementing the relocation of capital functions, it would be

necessary to make every effort to reduce increases of the public expenses needed for the project and related activities, while considering economic and other conditions, and to draw up detailed plans for the relocation.

(3) Comparison with Tokyo

Using documents containing information about the advantages and disadvantages of the two cases, the Council discussed two options—that capital functions be left in Tokyo and that capital functions be relocated to a new city. Selecting either of the two options is related to several options—how to reform the government overall, how to alleviate the excessive concentration of activities in Tokyo, and how to strengthen disaster preparedness. Choosing the best of these options for Japan's future seems to be the equivalent of choosing one of two options—to reform the government overall while changing Tokyo or using the relocation as an opportunity for reforming the government and converting Tokyo into a truly cosmopolitan city.