

## ARTICLES

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# ‘Human Dignity’ as an Indispensable Requirement for Sustainable Regional Economic Integration

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Seung Hwan Choi\*

*This article proposes the principle of human dignity as an indispensable requirement for sustainable regional economic integration, especially in East Asia. The contribution of free trade to economic growth and development is widely acknowledged. The economic survival of workers and farmers lacking international competitiveness has been, however, endangered, because of the expansion of trade liberalization and investment based on economic integration. Economic integration that ensures human dignity will promote successful and sustainable regional economic integration, by balancing economic prosperity and social integration. In this context, this article reviews the value and concept of human dignity as a goal and principle for regional economic integration. The author contends that neither sustainable prosperity nor a high level of economic development is itself a goal of economic integration, but merely a means by which to improve human dignity. Economic integration should, therefore, serve not only to maintain sustainable prosperity, but also to maximize human dignity.*

### Keywords

Human Dignity, Sustainable Economic Integration, Free Trade Agreement, Human Rights Approach, Precautionary Principle

\* Professor of International Law at Kyunghee University School of Law, Seoul, Korea. B.A./Ph.D.(SNU), LL.M. (SNU/NYU). This work was supported by the National Research Foundation of Korea Grant funded by the Korean Government MEST, Basic Research Promotion Fund (NRF-2011-013-B00090). The author may be contacted at: tomichoi@khu.ac.kr / Address: 26 Kyunghee-daero, Dongdaemun-gu, Seoul 130-701 Korea.

## I. Introduction

Regional trade agreements (“RTAs”) have become increasingly prevalent since the early 1990s. As of January 10, 2013, approximately 546 notifications of RTAs (counting goods and services separately) had been received by the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (“GATT”)<sup>1</sup> and the World Trade Organization (“WTO”). Of these, 354 were in force.<sup>2</sup> All RTAs under GATT and WTO systems have in common the status of being reciprocal free trade agreements between two or more member States.

Asian countries are getting more enthusiastic about RTAs. For example, South Korea, despite being a later-comer than the United States (“US”) and the European Union (“EU”) to the Free Trade Agreement (“FTA”), has actively concluded multiple FTAs since its first FTA with Chile in February 2003. Over the past decade, South Korea has signed 10 FTAs with Chile, Singapore, the European Free Trade Association (“EFTA”), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (“ASEAN”), India, EU, Peru, US, Turkey and Columbia; it is currently negotiating five more FTAs with Canada, Indonesia, China, Japan-China, and Vietnam.<sup>3</sup> In addition, negotiations to conclude the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (“RCEP”) are ongoing between ASEAN, South Korea, China, Japan, India, Australia and New Zealand. The ten member States of ASEAN have set a goal of establishing the ASEAN Economic Community by 2015, which may contribute to the creation of an East-Asian Economic Community.<sup>4</sup>

In 2012, meanwhile, negotiations for the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (“TPP”) continued between the following countries: Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Chile, Malaysia, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore, Vietnam, and the US. The 16th round of the TPP negotiations was held from March 4 through 13, 2013, in Singapore. Through the TPP, the US seeks to expand trade and investment in the dynamic Asia-Pacific region.<sup>5</sup> Once concluded, the TPP will become the most important RTA in the

<sup>1</sup> General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, Oct. 30, 1947, 61 Stat. A3, T.I.A.S. 1700, 55 U.N.T.S. 187. The GATT was modified and superseded in part by the GATT 1994, one of the WTO Agreements. The original GATT is now known as the GATT 1947.

<sup>2</sup> For details on the RTAs notified to the WTO, see the RTA Database, available at <http://rtais.wto.org/UI/PublicMaintainRTAHome.aspx> (last visited on Mar. 18, 2013).

<sup>3</sup> For details on the current status of and textbooks about the FTAs of Korea, see FTA Status of ROK, available at [http://www.mofat.go.kr/ENG/policy/fta/status/overview/index.jsp?menu=m\\_20\\_80\\_10](http://www.mofat.go.kr/ENG/policy/fta/status/overview/index.jsp?menu=m_20_80_10) (last visited on Apr. 8, 2013).

<sup>4</sup> See ASEAN Economic Community, available at <http://www.asean.org/communities/asean-economic-community> (last visited on Apr. 8, 2013). For details on the East Asian Community, see Y. Sato *Immigration Law and Policy of Japan in the Age of East Asian Community Building*, 3 J. EAST ASIA & INT’L L. 296-299 (2010).

<sup>5</sup> The 11 countries (Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Canada, Chile, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, the United