



Analysis of the Democratic Party Presidential Election

7 August

The Democratic Party (DP) Presidential election will be held on 1 September to select a replacement for Renho, who resigned from her post following the disastrous Tokyo Metropolitan Assembly Elections that inflicted heavy losses on the party. As of 7 August, Seiji Maehara and Yukio Edano have already announced their candidacies and Yuichiro Tamaki is largely expected to enter the race. Akira Nagatsuma is also reportedly considering a run to follow-up on his unsuccessful bid last year. Finally, the current DP Acting President Eda Kenji is rumored to be considering entering the race. In the last DP presidential election, Seiji Maehara and Yuichiro Tamaki won 27.1% and 13.7% of the vote respectively, ultimately losing to Renho who won 59.2% of the vote and the presidency.

As a rule, only Diet members can run for the candidacy and must collect between 20 and 25 recommenders to qualify for the election. Once selected, candidates are voted upon by Diet members, local DP municipal assemblies, and registered members of the DP.

| Candidate | Experience | Ran | District |
|-----------------|--|-----|----------------|
| Seiji Maehara | Former Minister of Land, Infrastructure and Transportation | ○ | Kyoto |
| Yukio Edano | Former Chief Cabinet Secretary, etc. | | Saitama Pref. |
| Yuichiro Tamaki | Acting DP Secretary-General | ○ | Kagawa Pref. |
| Eda Kenji | Acting DP President | | Kanagawa Pref. |

Seiji Maehara, who ran unsuccessfully for DP President last year, has expressed his intention to run for the office again. He previously served as DP President from 2005 to 2006 and is known for his experience in security policy and diplomacy, having held several key positions in the government including Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of Land, Infrastructure and Transportation. While he has tried to revitalize the DP brand as a viable alternative to the LDP, many of his positions endear him to the more conservative wing of his party, including his stance on a constitutional amendment, which largely aligns with the LDP. In May 2017, he became the new president of the DP Parliamentary Group for the Promotion of Integrated Resorts. In his previous run for DP president, he championed free preschool education and medical care for children as well as the reinstatement of a system establishing maximum out-of-pocket totals for household spending on medical care.

Yukio Edano, a former DP Secretary-General who has gained substantial support from the liberal members of his party, has also announced his candidacy and is expected to pose a substantial challenge to Maehara. Edano previously served as Chief Cabinet Secretary during the Fukushima nuclear disaster and as Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry. He is also well known for his work in the Diet pursuing criminal accountability for the HIV-tainted blood scandal in the late 90s. He broadly supports the movement to amend the constitution but disagrees with the current LDP draft amendment and has offered a proposal of his own.

Yuichiro Tamaki, the acting DP Secretary-General, has not yet announced his candidacy, though he is largely expected to seek the 20 recommenders needed to run. He has been a member of the Committee of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries since he was first elected to the Diet in 2009 and has also served on the Parliamentary Group for Maritime Promotion. Within the DP, he served as Deputy Secretary-General for the Promotion of Integrated Resorts. Tamaki is familiar with agricultural issues, considering his family has worked in farming and his grandfather served as the president of his local agricultural cooperative. In the previous DP election, Tamaki proposed policies to reinvigorate rural industries by expanding international investment spurred by development of local airports and harbors.

Kenji Eda, the acting DP President, is rumored to be entering the race as well. He previously worked for the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry. Before entering the DP, Eda ran for the Diet as an Independent and also served as the leader of the Japan Innovation Party. In the recent Yokohama mayoral election in July 2017, Eda supported the anti-IR candidate, Daiki Ito, who ultimately lost.

Overall, Maehara and Edano are generally expected to be the two major candidates personifying the inter-party competition between conservatives and liberals. With the departure of several prominent DP members from the conservative side of the party, including Akihisa Nagashima and Goshi Hosono, the maneuvering by Maehara and the conservative wing will likely be closely watched. Key issues in the run-up to the election include the possibility of a constitutional amendment, the impending consumption tax increase, and future election collaboration between the DP and the Communist Party. While recent news has been dominated by the Abe Administration's Cabinet reshuffle, the leadership contest in Japan's main opposition party will likely take center stage as election day approaches.

Should Maehara win, which is not unlikely, we can expect a much smoother passage of the implementation bill in the Diet. Although he in the past has somehow hesitated spending political capital defending the I.R. bill, with him at the top the party is likely to not resist the implementation bill or perhaps even vote for it.