

Latvia national day

Latvia and Japan: Past, present and future

Valdis Zatlers
PRESIDENT OF LATVIA



On behalf of the people of Latvia, I would like to convey my sincere greetings and express the deepest respect to Their Imperial Majesties Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko, to H.E. Prime Minister Naoto Kan and the people of Japan. I would also like to use this opportunity to thank The Japan Times newspaper for being able to address its readers on this very special occasion.

Latvia and Japan share deep historical bonds. The idea of self-determination, which had flourished during World War I, reached Latvia in the early 20th century and resulted in the proclamation of independence of the Republic of Latvia on Nov. 18, 1918. In years to come Latvia was recognized by countries near and far, and Japan was one of the first countries to recognize Latvia's de facto independence more than 90 years ago. It was a significant and challenging historical time for both countries, and Japan showed the willingness to build friendly relations between our countries. Japan had sent its first diplomatic envoys to Riga starting from 1923, six years before opening the diplomatic mission in Latvia.

Japan and Latvia have long enjoyed warm and friendly ties that have developed in a steady manner. After the renewal of diplomatic relations in October 1991, we have experienced the opening of diplomatic missions and the exchange of high-level visits of our officials. We have established sister-city cooperation and welcomed Japanese artists in Latvia and vice versa. Tourism has risen and thus we have gradually built a deeper understanding of our cultures. It was of the utmost honor for Latvian nation to welcome Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko to Latvia in May 2007. The distinguished visit proved that

Latvia and Japan share more than anybody had expected.

There is a place called Garden of Destinies in Latvia. An international competition was announced back in 2005 to generate ideas about the artistic and philosophical concept of this place of commemoration and the first prize was given to the project "Meisow," by Japanese landscape architect Shunmyo Masuno. It is built with the support of the entire Latvian nation on the island in the middle of the River Daugava to commemorate all the people Latvia lost during the last century after declaring Latvia's independence — those fallen in the wars, those oppressed and those forced to abandon Latvia. Garden of Destinies is the place where the past meets the present and the future, thus forming infinity.

This May, I had the honor to receive a Stone of Peace made from a tile from the tragedy of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima. Inspired by this meaningful gesture, an artwork was created blending a stone unearthed in Latvia with the precious Japanese gift, thus creating a symbol of intertwined destinies. Its home will be at the Garden of Destinies, thus marking the special bond between the Latvian and Japa-

nese nations.

Since 2004, Latvia has enjoyed full membership in the European Union and NATO. At present, connections are faster, distances are shorter, opportunities do not have limits, but also no country is left intact by global economic challenges, security threats and climate change. Latvia deeply believes in the power of democratic and comprehensive global governance thus bringing peace and prosperity to the world. We have learned our lessons from the financial crisis and have performed the vital reforms creating an attractive place to invest and start a business. Latvia believes that many of those challenges can be addressed by both our countries working together, be it bilaterally or through international forums.

Apart from the inevitable complications the globalized world faces nowadays, let me express my true belief that we will overcome every difficulty we face as long as we believe in the power of hearts and minds. People are a true potential of this century. Existing student exchanges between Latvia and Japan are a step toward a deep insight into the culture of Japan and vice versa.

However, there is more to offer. I am confident that you will

find Latvia a charming vacation place as well. Latvia is a place for the sophisticated and intelligent traveler, offering visitors UNESCO World Heritage sites, superb cuisine, world-class ballet, opera and art exhibits. Latvia is also a place for humble nature lovers, for those looking for dynamic and modern entertainment, for explorers to discover yet the unexplored.

With its growing Riga International Airport, Latvia is successfully connecting Scandinavia, Commonwealth of Independent States countries and the rest of Europe for businesspeople.

The Baltic Sea provides a wide range of logistic opportunities, linking the East and the West. We believe that both Lati-

va and Japan can gain from the economic opportunities this position provides.

I am convinced that Latvia and Japan are poised for excellent cooperation in the future. By deepening the understanding of our two countries, I believe we are creating a framework for long-lasting cooperation.

Next year there are two historical events in the relations of Latvia and Japan: 90th anniversary since Japan recognized Latvia's independence and 20th anniversary since the renewal of diplomatic relations. We will celebrate the events sincerely and I invite you to join us.

In 90 years we have created a framework for future generations to continue successful co-



Five centuries: Decorating the Christmas tree may have had its origin in Riga in 1510. LIVE RIGA, RIGA TOURISM DEVELOPMENT BUREAU

operation between Latvia and Japan. Let me truly express the belief of infinite and friendly relations between Latvia and Japan, filled with pragmatism and mutual understanding. Infinity is where we find the consolation, the fortitude and the inspiration to fulfill our mutual dreams.

Congratulations
*to the People of the Republic of Latvia
on the 92nd Anniversary of
Their Independence Day*


Riga Collection

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Japan Latvia Society In Kansai
3-3-5, Umeda, Kita-ku, Osaka