

Belgium King's Day

Quality the key to further developing relationship

GUNTHER SLEEUWAGEN
AMBASSADOR OF BELGIUM



Japan and Belgium have come a long way together. Many achievements embody the outstanding relations between our two countries. Japan and Belgium, within the European Union,

are united by the shared values on which our societies, economies and political systems are based. These values lie at the heart of our cooperation and foreign policies.

Bilateral relations between Japan and Belgium are characterized by long-standing political relations of friendship and trust, a dense network of cultural and scientific cooperation and exchanges, a high-level of trade and especially by strong relations of warm friendship between the Imperial house of Japan and the Royal House of Belgium. This specific relationship is truly valued and nurtured by His Majesty Emperor Akihito and His Majesty Philippe, King of the Belgians.

Following up on last year's commemoration of 150 years of friendly relations, we are embracing many new aspects. In 2017, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe visited Belgium, and Belgium's Speaker of the House Siegfried Bracke visited Japan. Trade figures are up, more Belgians are visiting Japan, more Japanese are reciprocating in Belgium,



Their Majesties King Philippe and Queen Mathilde are escorted by Their Majesties Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko during their state visit in October 2016.

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and Japanese and Belgian investments are increasing considerably. Many exquisite Belgian cultural events take place in Japan, while Japanese tourists are rediscovering the cultural and gastronomic treasures of our country and are benefiting from the direct flight between Tokyo and Brussels.

One aspect I would like to particularly highlight is our renewed academic coop-

eration. No less than 55 Japanese universities have cooperation agreements with Belgian universities and more and more of them are sending students and researchers to Belgium. Belgium offers more than 140 bachelor and master degrees in English, which are attractive to Japanese students. Over the last three years we have seen an increase in the biomedical and life sciences segment of our academic exchange.

Belgium also remains a safe and productive destination for Japanese overseas investment. Outside of the EU, Japan is the second-largest investor in Belgium. In light of upcoming changes in the EU's constellation, Belgium welcomes a growing interest by Japanese investors; be it in insurance, banking, biotechnology or any other dynamic business sector. Thanks to new investments in the energy and service sectors, the number of Japanese investments in Belgium has recently increased to over 300 companies employing more than 29,000 people.

Belgium is also eagerly looking forward to the success of the 2020 Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics. Exactly 100 years ago, the city of Antwerp hosted the 1920 Olympics. It was there that Japan won its first Olympic medals, with Ichiya Kumagai taking the silver in both tennis singles and — with partner Seiichiro Kashio — doubles.

Japan and Belgium, as a founding member of the European Union, also share the determination to build a strengthened relationship between Japan and the EU, based on a strategic partnership agreement and

an economic partnership agreement. Japan and the EU will be leading the way into a rule-of-law-based international trade system. As industrial nations in a free world, such is the determination we need to uphold. And Japan and the EU together account for more than one-third of the world economy.

Quality is a key word in the development of our relations. This quest for quality remains the driving standard in our products and our services. It is not just the quality of the product, be it a tasty beer, a nanotechnological application or a perfectly timed delivery, it is the overall sense of quality in all its dimensions that Belgium is striving for.

Please, become part of the long history and dynamic future between Japan and Belgium.

Embarking on a new chapter in mutual history

KIMIKAZU SUGAWARA
PRESIDENT, JAPAN-BELGIUM SOCIETY



On the occasion of the King's Day of Belgium, it is with great pleasure that I express my sincere congratulations.

2016 was the year when Belgium and Japan celebrated 150 years of friend-

ship in commemoration of the establishment of diplomatic relations. Among the many memorable events organized in Japan, Japanese people were most delighted with the state visit by Their Majesties King Philippe and Queen Mathilde.

In 2017, the two nations started a new chapter in their history. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe visited Belgium twice this year. On his second visit in July, the agreement in principle of the Japan-EU economic partnership agreement (EPA) was announced. The Japanese prime minister and Belgian Prime Minister Charles Michel welcomed it together and confirmed the importance of the EPA for maintaining the flag of free trade. As a member of the EU, Belgium will become a more important partner to Japan than ever before.

I profoundly hope that the strong ties between Belgium and Japan will continue to grow and contribute to the prosperous future of both countries.



The Japan-inspired Brussels Flower Carpet 2016 was created to celebrate the 150th anniversary of bilateral friendship. ©WIM VANMAELE

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Congratulations
to the People
of the
Kingdom of Belgium on
Their King's Day



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