

Belgium King's Day Special

Close cooperation in a variety of areas

ROXANE DE BILDERLING
AMBASSADOR OF BELGIUM



It is the time of the year again when we admire the beautiful and vivid autumn colors, prepare to celebrate the Belgian King's Day, and reflect upon the strong links between Belgium and Japan across a multitude of areas.

The fight against the spread of the novel coronavirus has been a key area of cooperation between Japan and Belgium this past year. You may be surprised to learn that many of the COVID-19 vaccines used in Japan are mainly produced in Belgium and the European Union. Japan was the largest beneficiary of the vaccine production, with one-third of all vaccine doses produced in the European Union exported to Japan (about 250 million out of 750 million doses exported).

Together, our countries are also greatly contributing to the international efforts to share vaccines with the rest of the world, through the COVAX support mechanism.

A friend in need is a friend indeed: This is so true of our friendship with Japan, as the

numbers are increasingly proving every day.

Cooperation in the pharmaceutical and health sectors is as strong as ever. During my visit to the BioJapan biotechnology fair, I saw that mutual investment was strong and that top Belgian biotech companies are showcasing their most recent innovations and entering the Japanese market.

Cooperation on research is also very strong. Belgian companies have brought top innovative technologies for the treatment of cancer to Japan, such as a large but extremely precise proton-therapy machine that I had the chance to view in Sapporo a few months ago.

In addition to that, the University of Ghent and the National Cancer Center Japan teamed up and recently announced an interesting discovery that will help understand the structure of receptors involved in various cancers and other diseases, an important step toward new therapeutic approaches.

In the context of the 26th Conference of the Parties to the climate change convention, it is the right moment to showcase our countries' combined efforts in the production of renewable energy.

For example, Belgium is steadily developing its wind energy production and has become fourth in the world in terms of countries with the largest offshore wind

capacity, despite its modest size. This is done with some Japanese investment, while Belgian expertise is supporting the development of this technology to handle the specific challenges associated with Japan, such as its deep water.

Furthermore, the very first passenger ship running on hydrogen was recently inaugurated by a joint Japan-Belgium venture, and more projects around tugboats and others are being developed, while new projects on the production of hydrogen have also begun.

Regarding biogas, a Belgian company in association with a French company has started implementing biogas solutions in breeding farms.

Another Belgian company has been installing smart sensors on high-voltage lines in Japan to improve electricity transport monitoring and efficiency, to facilitate the inclusion of renewables on the grid, and to avoid accidents and waste. It is inspiring to see our countries' companies work together to come up with solutions to the issue of climate change.

To highlight our strong economic links, but most of all to explore many more

potential partnerships, HRH Princess Astrid, sister of HM King Philippe, will lead an economic mission to Japan in November 2022. The deep and long-lasting relations between the imperial and royal families are the heart of the multifaceted Japan-Belgian interpersonal relations.

In the academic world, Belgium has continued to welcome Japanese students who wished to study in Belgium despite the pandemic. We do indeed hope that Belgian students and researchers who have research programs and exchanges planned in Japan will soon be allowed to enter the country. I have visited several universities that have links with Belgium and the same sentiment was voiced there as well. More generally, efforts are being made for the mutual recognition of vaccination certificates, and we hope that this will lead to the reopening of the important people-to-people exchanges between our two countries.

Another important dimension in our relations with Japan is the rich and diverse cultural exchanges that are taking place, be it in visual arts or music. I have attended several concerts of musicians who either studied in Belgium or participated in the



King Philippe and Queen Mathilde pose with their children.

BELGIUM ROYAL PALACE / BAS BOGAERTS

famous Queen Elisabeth Music Competition, which is held in Brussels every year. Japanese musicians very often find their way among the top finalists of this very prestigious contest.

It is heartwarming and so motivating to list these active and enriching ties that exist between Belgium and Japan, and I am very

much looking forward to continuing the promotion and strengthening of our ties even further.

This content was compiled in collaboration with the embassy. The views expressed here do not necessarily reflect those of the newspaper.

Important milestones mark a long and friendly relationship

KIMIKAZU SUGAWARA
PRESIDENT, THE JAPAN-BELGIUM SOCIETY



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

The fight against the novel coronavirus has continued globally and each one of us has been

experiencing difficulties we had never seen before. These difficulties, however, created the occasion for the world to make broader collaborations rapidly, as we witnessed with the production of the COVID-19 vaccines. In February, Japan received the first vaccines

produced in the small town of Puurs, Belgium. As the Japan-Belgium Society, we were delighted to learn of this and see Belgium's contribution shared with the world.

2021 is a commemorative year in the history of the Japan-Belgium relationship. In 1921, his majesty the then-crown prince, who would later become Emperor Showa, traveled for the first time to Europe, including a stop in Belgium. In 1971, his majesty visited Belgium again, which became his first official visit to a foreign country as Emperor Showa. This year marks the 100th and the 50th anniversaries of the two visits, which have continued to be symbolic

in representing the long and strong ties between Japan and Belgium, as well as the Japanese imperial and the Belgian royal families.

The friendship and goodwill toward our countries expressed by the Japanese emperor and the king of the Belgians have been succeeded not only by their families, but also by their people. This can be seen in the sister-city movement. There are eight sister city relationships between our countries, of which the oldest is between Himeji, Hyogo Prefecture, and Charleroi signed in 1965. This was followed by Kanazawa and Ghent in 1971, which marks another 50th

anniversary to be celebrated this year. These and other paired cities have been offering possibilities for various exchanges among their populations and promoting our good bilateral relationship for many years.

The Japan-Belgium Society has also inherited the legacy of friendship and good will. For more than 50 years, we have been embodying such spirit into action. Our 64 corporate members and 218 individual members have been a true driver of diplomacy. I sincerely wish that Japan and Belgium will further develop our close relationship and deepen exchanges in many fields, as we continue to contribute to it.



Left: Belgian athletes wave during the opening ceremony of the 2020 Olympic Games in Tokyo on July 23.

Bottom: Brussels' Central Square, the Grand Place, is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

IMAGE BELGA / EMBASSY OF BELGIUM



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on the Belgian King's Day



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