

Belgian prime minister's visit

Belgium, Japan grow strong from their people

Yves Leterme
PRIME MINISTER OF BELGIUM

If the possession of rich natural resources was a condition for national wealth, Japan and Belgium would be poor countries. But clearly, things do not work that way. It is well known that Japan is the second-largest economy in the world. Belgium, for its part, ranks fourteenth in the world in terms of Gross National Product per capita, 20th in GNP in absolute figures, and 12th in the value of its exports.

We owe the relative positions of our densely populated countries to investment in the most precious asset any country has, its people. We owe it to investment in education, in learning, in innovation.

A recently published study of the Belgium Japan Association, which compares the business climate of Belgium and its neighbors,



Yves Leterme © CHANCERY OF THE PRIME MINISTER-DGEC

ranks Belgium as the most globalized country worldwide. Among our principal assets are, the study says, "the availability of a highly educated and productive workforce" and of a "multilingual workforce."

The study also mentions our favorable taxation policy toward foreign companies; our

central location in the European Union, a market of half a billion people; and the presence in our capital of the European institutions. Our relatively cheap rents come as an added bonus.

I am very glad that many Japanese companies discovered those assets many years ago. We very much value the presence of 220 Japanese companies in Belgium, the tens of thousands of jobs they have created, the investment of \$2.2 billion in 2008. I hope that they will continue to appreciate the business environment we offer.

I also warmly invite new companies to come and avail themselves of the opportunities we offer in the heart of the European Union. They will not only discover economic opportunities, but also a country with a high quality of life, a country moreover with excellent relations with Japan, which are symbolized by the close links between the Imperial House of Japan and the Royal House of Belgium.

World class in many industries

Steven Vanackere
DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AND MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND INSTITUTIONAL REFORM OF BELGIUM

I cannot but agree with Prime Minister Yves Leterme that Belgium offers a very high quality of life. For several decades, many Japanese consumers have enjoyed the products of the Belgian food and luxury industries. Famous boutiques, for instance in Omotesando and Ginza, testify to the excellence of our fashion industry.

Still, one should not forget that Belgium is also a world-class partner in other industries. One example is the aviation industry: Belgian companies participate, for instance, in the production of the Airbus 380.

The technology industry is a pillar of the Belgian economy. Innovative materials, intelligent process design and new technologies are developed



Steven Vanackere

and used by many, often small- and medium-size Belgian companies in sectors ranging from industrial automation, information and communication technologies to mechatronic engineering, plastics and composites and the automotive industry. Quite often these Belgian companies take the lead in very

specific and attractive niche markets where they develop groundbreaking solutions that can be of use for a whole set of industries. It goes without saying that Japan's world-renowned high-tech companies will find reliable and highly flexible partners in Belgium.

Let me also remind you of Belgium's excellent and well-known reputation in the pharmaceutical and chemical industries. The port of Antwerp harbors the second most important petrochemical cluster in the world. For many investors in the sector, this offers unique opportunities.

Dynamism, creativity, flexibility and technological excellence can be added to the long list of Belgian qualities and assets already mentioned by Prime Minister Leterme. Many Japanese firms have already found their way to Belgium. I am convinced others will follow and will enjoy a bright future in Belgium.

New Embassy of Belgium in Japan opens

The Embassy of Belgium is celebrating the opening of its new embassy building in Tokyo on April 8 with an official ceremony followed by a reception in the presence of Yves Leterme, prime minister of Belgium, and Steven Vanackere, deputy prime minister and minister of foreign affairs of Belgium.

After two years of construction, the Embassy of Belgium in Tokyo returns to its premises in Kojimachi, in the very same grounds where then Belgian diplomat Albert de Basompierre took possession of the country's first embassy in Tokyo 80 years ago.

For almost half a century the old embassy compound with the residence of the ambassador and its renowned Japanese garden had been a privileged meeting place for

two or perhaps three generations of Japanese and Belgian friends of all walks of life. Its excellent location at the heart of the quiet Chiyoda Ward, at a walking distance from the Imperial Palace, played an important role in making it an attractive place for homely get-togethers. During those occasions, shape and content have been given to the very friendly relations between both countries and peoples. All ambassadors with no exception took pride in hosting functions, concerts and receptions at their residence that many of the guests have considered as one of the most pleasant in town.

However, at the turn of century the embassy buildings no longer fully met the high standards of safety and prestige that may be expected from

Belgium's political and diplomatic representation in Japan. Therefore, the tearing down of the premises became unavoidable.

In 2006, the Belgian government launched a public tender procedure to select a candidate to buy a part of the embassy grounds and to build an embassy complex on the remaining land. Among seven competitors, the Belgian government selected the Japanese consortium MTOB (Mitsubishi Estate Co., Takenaka Corp. and architect Noriaki Okabe).

From the end of 2007, the redevelopment project of the Belgian embassy property was realized. The new block was designed in the spirit of the human scale that characterizes historic European towns. The southern, triangular part is occupied by the embassy, prolonged with a garden of both Belgian and Japanese inspiration. The height of the two buildings is scaled in relation to their surroundings and the white wall separating both properties stands as a homage to the old property wall, reminiscent of a traditional Japanese mansion.

The embassy building is set on a podium facing the plaza named "Belgium Square," paved with blue stone from Belgium.

The northwest facade is another distinctive feature of the building. With its curved corner and its coating of limestone from Portugal, it provides a sophisticated and typi-



New face: The Belgian Embassy building incorporates limestone from Portugal in its northwest facade. ©NOAN

cally European appearance to the Belgian representation in Japan.

The embassy building contains not only the chancellery and other offices, but also a spacious reception space as well as the residences for the

ambassador, diplomats and other staff members.

Another interesting feature of this new building is its state-of-the-art shock absorption system, which makes it particularly resistant to earthquakes.



Back home: Steps lead up to the entrance of the Belgian Embassy's new building. T.OKAMOTO/NOAN

Tradition of friendly relations resumes after two-year hiatus

Johan Maricou
AMBASSADOR OF BELGIUM

There are reasons from A to Z to be in Belgium and I think both Mr. Leterme and Mr. Vanackere

have given the readers of The Japan Times enough inspiration as to why Belgium matters to business in Europe and the world.

As I deliver this message to you, the Belgian Embassy has

returned to its home of almost half a century, at the heart of quiet Chiyoda Ward. A brand new compound building has indeed been erected over the last two years at this same location, within walking distance from the Imperial Palace grounds.

It is my sincere wish that the new embassy will, just like the previous one, prove an attractive place for homely get-togethers for several generations of Japanese and Belgian friends of all walks of life. Our old embassy enjoyed a rich tradition of pleasant func-

tions, concerts and receptions. Be assured that I, together with my successors in Tokyo, will be eager to continue this tradition, thereby contributing to shape the very friendly relations between our countries and peoples.

To mark the end of this two-year hiatus, a grand opening in the presence of, among others, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Belgium will be held today, April 8, 2010. In addition, a Japanese winner and a Japanese finalist of the famous Belgian musical contest named after the late Queen

Elizabeth will perform at the Kioi Hall tonight, to further mark the occasion.

It is my contribution as an ambassador of my country in Japan to ensure that the Belgian Embassy, with its Regional Trade Offices for Brussels, Flanders and Wallonia, is able to welcome you. With the commitment that you can always rely on, the tailor-made support from the great variety of investment experts working at the embassy and the Belgian authorities there, I can only express my sincere hope that you will be able to find a big opportunity in our small country.

At the embassy, we will listen with great interest to what your next decisive move in Belgium is going to be and I can only strongly advise you to contact the Trade Offices mentioned below for any query or information you may

need. I wish you all the best of luck with your business endeavors in Belgium.

Contact information:
—The Trade Office for Flanders (Flanders Investment and Trade) c/o Embassy of Belgium 3F, 5-4 Nibancho, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo
E-mail (Investments): contact@fitagency.com
E-mail (Trade): tokyo@fitagency.com
—The Trade Office for Brussels Capital Region c/o Embassy of Belgium 3F, 5-4 Nibancho, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo
E-mail: tokyo@brussels-japan.or.jp

—The Trade Office for Wallonia (Agence wallonne a l'Exportation et aux Investissements etrangers) c/o Embassy of Belgium 3F, 5-4 Nibancho, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo
E-mail: awextokyo@belgium-wallonia.jp

Heartiest Welcome
to Their Excellencies Yves Leterme,
Prime Minister, and
Steven Vanackere, Deputy Prime Minister and
Minister of Foreign Affairs, of Belgium
and
Congratulations
on the Opening of Belgium's New Embassy Building

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Congratulations on the Opening of Belgium's New Embassy Building

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(In alphabetical order)