

Belgium King's Day

Shared views on global issues

Gunther Sleguwaen
AMBASSADOR OF BELGIUM

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

In that framework, 2015 was another year of excellent cooperation. Prime Minister Charles Michel visited Japan and had the honor to be received by His Majesty Emperor Akihito. He also met with Prime Minister Abe and welcomed the notion that both our countries have convergent views with regard to the different global challenges and regional issues that we are confronted with today. Be it on a bilateral or multilateral level, Japan and Belgium work closely together and strive for a better, peaceful world in which all countries can develop, free from external or internal coercion.



Together with Vice Prime Minister Kris Peeters, our prime minister also focused successfully on identifying Belgium as an investment haven for Japanese industries and companies. Belgium is an attractive destination for Japanese investors. Owing to the fact of new investments in the energy and service sectors — the number of Japanese investments in Belgium recently increased to over 300 companies employing more than 29,000 people.

Adding to this, 2015 marked the launch of a new nonstop direct flight between Japan and Belgium, operated by ANA. This flight will certainly contribute to the reinforcement of business and leisure visits.

Japan and Belgium, which is a founding member of the European Union, also share the determination to build a strengthened relationship between Japan and the EU, the legal basis of which will be both the strategic partnership agreement (SPA) and the free trade agreement (FTA). Whereas the SPA should pave the way for closer political, security and global economic cooperation and a better promotion of our common rules on the world scene, the FTA should allow us to almost fully liberalize trade in goods and services, eliminate

non-tariff barriers and achieve a high degree of harmonization of standards and other trade-related rules and regulations.

The negotiations are progressing well and could lead to a successful conclusion provided that the scope and the level of ambition of the agreements are not downgraded. As industrial nations in a free world, such is the determination that both countries need to uphold.

The EU is a concept of integration where democracy, economic development and stability are cherished and profusely existent. These values need thought, attention and work at all times. For example, the EU is addressing current issues such as migration with a long-term approach. The humanitarian dimension is the most urgent in the short term, but we will also work positively toward a sustainable integration and stabilization of migration matters. European countries have wide experience in constructive integration of migrants. At the global level, it means we have to work together and Belgium is very grateful to Japan for the interest the country is showing in the future development of the European Union.

Bilateral relations between Japan and Belgium are charac-

terized by long-standing political, relations of friendship and trust, by a dense network of cultural and scientific cooperation and exchanges, by a high-level of trade and by relations of warm friendship between the Imperial house of Japan and the Royal House of Belgium, inherited from previous generations and valued and matured by His Majesty Emperor Akihito and by His Majesty Philippe, King of the Belgians.

Such friendship started officially 149 years ago. So next year in 2016, we will be celebrating 150 years of diplomatic relations. Belgium was the ninth country in the world to sign a treaty with Japan after it opened up to the world in the mid-nineteenth century. This was even before the Meiji revolution, and it was quite an achievement for the small and young Belgium, only 36 years independent and trying to take part in the first wave of globalization of that period. High level visits, exhibitions, concerts and more both in Japan and in Belgium will highlight the year. We will be very happy to provide with a diversified and high quality program, throughout this beautiful country.

Quality is a key word in the development of our relations.



King Philippe of Belgium and his wife Queen Mathilde

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This search for quality remains the driving standard in our products and our services. It is not just the quality of the product you will enjoy, be it a taste-

ful beer, a nanotech application or a perfectly timed delivery, it is the overall complement of quality in all its dimensions which is being sought after and

Further strengthening bilateral ties

Takao Kusakari
PRESIDENT, JAPAN-BELGIUM SOCIETY

I would like to offer my heartfelt congratulations on the occasion of the King's Day of Belgium.

Belgium and Japan were able to spend another year further strengthening the good bilateral relationship through many exchanges of people between our two countries, including Prime Minister of Belgium Charles Michel's visit to Japan.

On Oct. 25, a direct flight was launched between Tokyo and Brussels. The added convenience of this new flight has facilitated both business and tourism.

After being committed to bilateral exchanges for four years, former Ambassador Luc Liebaut returned home, and his successor the new Ambassador Gunther Sleguwaen shall continue the work Liebaut began.

In 2016, Japan and Belgium will mark the 150th anniversary of their diplomatic relations, which will be celebrated through many events currently being planned. The official logo has been chosen and it will be visible at various events over the coming year. I sincerely hope the exchanges and cooperation in various areas will be further strengthened on this occasion.

The "Belgian Beer Weekends" have taken root and developed into a nationwide event in Japan being held in seven cities, including Hiroshima, which took part for the first time this year.

Bilateral exchanges also deepened in the art field, as seen in Rene Magritte exhibitions this year.

I extend my best wishes for 2016 that many companies, organizations and people will be able to enjoy the 150th anniversary between Belgium and Japan.



Ghent is a hidden gem ready to welcome many visitors

Ghent is still a well-kept secret and is definitely worth a visit. Visitors who are already familiar with the city have become loyal ambassadors. Ghent has so much more to offer than the Castle of the Counts and the splendid views of Graslei and Korenlei. It offers a unique combination of authenticity, creativity and natural local flair. What's more, it's a human-scaled city in the heart of Flanders with added value thanks to its many waterways.

What makes Ghent unique? First of all is the city's excellent location. And of course The Adoration of the Mystic Lamb, the triptych by the Van Eyck brothers that is displayed at St. Bavo's Cathedral. Moreover, Ghent is the only city with a lighting plan, which illuminates the streets and buildings at night, showcasing them from a different angle. Ghent

is also home to the festival city of Flanders, boasting the largest outdoor city festival in Europe. And if you're a fan of flowers, you'll undoubtedly know that Ghent hosts a highly prestigious flower exhibition, the Florales. Last, but not least, which other city has a real castle in its city center?

The 2016 Ghent Florales
In the spring of 2016, Ghent will host a new, dynamic and interactive city festival with the Ghent Florales (Ghent Flower Show). The Arts Quarter — the Citadel Park, St. Peter's Square, the Leopold Barracks and the Bijloke site — will form the setting for a 10-day bustling flower and plant festival with floral art, inspirational gardens, nature-inspired projects and exhibitions. Visitors can do more than just look and admire; they can also experience and participate in interactive workshops.

Celebrating 150 years of Belgium-Japan diplomatic relations and as part of the sister city partnership between Ghent and Kanazawa, Ishikawa Prefecture, Japan will be an honored guest of the 2016 Ghent Florales. Kanazawa will fill a large part of the Bijloke site where floral artists engage in dialogue with an Oriental theme.



In Ghent's old city center, Gravensteen Castle is seen from Graslei harbor on the Leie River, along which is splendid architecture from the Middle Ages and lush greenery. VISITGENT

Information provided by VISITFLANDERS/Tourist Office for Flanders & Brussels, Belgium. For more information, visit www.visitflanders.com.



Unique lights illuminate Ghent in the evening. VISITGENT

Congratulations on the Belgian King's Day

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Congratulations to the people of Belgium on their King's Day



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