The future based on 150 years of friendship

Queen Margrethe II’s Birthday

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Yesterday, April 16 marked the 77th birthday of Her Majesty Queen Margrethe II of Denmark. The occasion was celebrated at the Royal Danish Embassy with music, laughter and Danish food. 2017 marks a historic year for the Kingdom of Denmark. In January, Denmark could celebrate both the 45th anniversary of the European market in 1963 and the conclusion of the Treaty of Friendship, Commerce and Navigation, which established diplomatic ties with Japan in 1867. In fact, 2017 marks several anniversaries, Sixty years ago, in 1957, Scandinavian Airlines System (SAS) opened the first direct route between Japan and Europe flying across the North Pole, cutting eight hours off the route between Japan and Europe flying directly. Also 50 years ago, Danish high-end porcelain brand Royal Copenhagen opened their first store in Tokyo. The brand has gained widespread popularity in Japan, and today there are more than 40 Royal Copenhagen stores and outlets throughout the country.

Our countries should use this historic anniversary as a steppingstone to further strengthen our bond. Based on the ambitious strategic partnership agreement, which was entered into between our countries in 2014, both nations will further collaborate within areas such as food and agriculture, sustainable energy, green tech and health and wellness technology. A conclusion and ratification of the EU-Japan free trade agreement of the utmost priority for the government of Denmark. The agreement will serve as a natural step extending the ideas and values from the original treaty from 1867. The free trade agreement will open new markets for companies and manufacturers, as well as improve supply for consumers.

Japan and Denmark are both aging societies and will face similar challenges in the future. Therefore it is only natural to work together to find the solutions. Hope the anniversary will also serve to further academic collaboration and student exchange — a natural driver for innovation.

To celebrate our 150th anniversary of diplomatic ties, a number of cultural events are planned in both countries. The famous Danish Skagen paintings are currently on exhibit at the National Museum of Western Art in Tokyo. Influenced by impressionism and realism, the Skagen painters created these beautiful pieces in the 1870s — not long after the treaty with Japan was signed. In May, the Danish jazz club Jazzhouse will take over Tokyo jazz club Super Deluxe for 10 days — creating a complete Danish experience with Nordic paintings, Danish interior design, wine and beer, and even food prepared by the chef-owner of Michelin-starred restaurant Goma. From August an exhibition titled “Everyday Life — Thinking Design” will focus on Japanese and Danish design at the 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa. In Denmark, the National Art Gallery is currently exhibiting “Japanomania,” an exhibition showcasing Japanese influence on Nordic painters and artists through the late 1800s and early 1900s. In the unique gallery, the Cisterns in Copenhagen, Japanese architect Hiroshi Sambuichi has created a beautiful installation, which has already gained much praise both within and outside of Denmark.

I can definitely say that 2017 is a year of celebration between Denmark and Japan. We build on our common past and look to the future where we can develop our two ties even further. As the ambassador of Denmark to Japan and as a Dane, I am proud to see the strength and depth of the relationship between our two countries — our countries might be far apart, but we are close in spirit.

Readers can find additional information on the anniversary at www.denmarkjapan150.jp.