

Latvia National Day

Economic cooperation strengthens ties

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AMBASSADOR OF LATVIA



It is a great honor to address the readers of The Japan Times and the people of Japan on the occasion of the 99th Anniversary of the Proclamation of Independence of Latvia on Nov. 18, 1918.

On behalf of the people of Latvia and the President of Latvia, H.E. Raimonds Vejonis, I would like to express our deepest respect to Their Majesties Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko, Prime Minister H.E. Shinzo Abe and the people of Japan.

Latvia and Japan are like-minded partners, who share common interests and fundamental values of freedom and democracy, thus creating a solid basis for a long lasting cooperation between our two countries.

Through a variety of projects in fields such as economic cooperation, music, art and design and also people-to-people contacts, exchanges between our two countries have continued to grow, leading to the steady increase of trade and numbers of Japanese tourists visiting Latvia. I would also like to mention the ever-growing cooperation between our sister cities, Riga and Kobe, as well as Rujiena and Hokkaido's Higashikawa.

The year 2017 started with a big step forward in our bilateral economic relations, with the signing of the Convention on the Avoidance of Double Taxation. Together with an upcoming conclusion of the free trade agreement between Japan and the EU, we look forward to increasing the cooperation in the field of business and trade.

In 2018, Latvia will celebrate a centenary since our declaration of independence on Nov. 18, 1918. Today, Latvia is a modern and dynamic North European country with bustling IT sector and a highly skilled, multilingual and motivated work force. Latvia is among the fastest growing EU economies with a 5 percent gross domestic product forecast for this year.

Our capital city Riga is ranked among the "TOP-10 fastest-growing European cities" by a number of companies and is steadily developing as a major financial, trade and business center in the Baltic Sea region. Traditional industries such as wood processing, engineering and food processing are strengthened by the dynamic growth of the IT, electronic and pharmaceutical industries. Our local ecosystem is a magnet for large financial groups, as well as fintech start-ups, making Latvia a regional fintech hub in recent years. The ports of Riga, Ventspils and Liepaja are at the core of Latvia's vital shipping and transit industry.

Latvia is also one of the greenest countries in the world. Coupled with a cultur-

ally rich environment, it has been a source of inspiration for many famous artists, dancers, singers and composers. Riga is listed as a UNESCO World Heritage site, known for its large collection of art nouveau architecture.

If you have a chance to visit Latvia next summer, Riga will be filled with Latvians from all over the world coming together to sing and dance in the Nationwide Latvian Song and Dance Festival, a highlight of the Latvian centenary festivities. The Nationwide Latvian Song and Dance Festival is one of the largest amateur choral events in the world, where more than 30,000 singers and dancers devoted to ethnic traditions, dressed in gorgeous national costumes, will join together in magnificent performances during a weeklong celebration that is included on UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage list.

We welcome the increasing interest of our Japanese partners to deepen relations with Latvia. The Embassy of Latvia and the Representative Office of the Investment and Development Agency of Latvia in Japan are at the disposal of our Japanese friends, whether they have business interests or plan to visit Latvia as tourists.

I would also like to express my gratitude to The Japan Times for giving us the opportunity to publish this article, and wish to congratulate all Latvians living in Japan and abroad, on this very special day.