

Norway National Day Special

Cultural exchanges and cooperation see bilateral relationship flourish

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May 17 is Norway's Constitution Day. Sealed on this day in 1814, Norway's constitution was one of the most liberal the world had seen. With timely revisions, it has remained for more

than two centuries the foundation of our state, democracy and human rights.

We celebrate our constitution day as a festival. After an early breakfast with family and friends, and the laying of commemorative wreaths, throngs of people dressed in national costumes or other festive clothes line the streets to watch and cheer schoolchildren's parades and marching bands, before gathering with their neighbors to sing and listen to appropriate wise words, and to enjoy playful competitions and good food. We have celebrated May 17 this way for 150 years, only interrupted by World War II.

Not so this year. Among all the disappointments of this pandemic, this is among the ones most deeply regretted in my country. What we will miss, is not only the speeches and songs, but also the joy of celebrating our society. The COVID-19 pandemic has put our national values in sharp relief — the importance of democracy, the rule of law, freedom and a welfare system available to all. It has also reminded us of the closeness of Norwegian society, which makes it work with so little fuss.

Digital togetherness, however advanced,

cannot substitute the physical reality we cannot have. At best, families and small groups of friends will be watching from their windows the appropriately spaced children and youth of the marching brass bands moving along near empty streets.

True to tradition, we were to celebrate May 17 in Tokyo as well. Families and friends, a little parade, waving flags and the national anthem sung — and ice cream, hot dogs and cakes in copious amounts. We would also have had speeches, in praise of our youth, in remembrance of our past, celebrating what we have achieved and what we still hope to do. Obviously, I will not be holding my speech this year.

I am all the happier for this opportunity to express my appreciation to Japan and its people, for our deep friendship and important cooperation. In spite of being separated by the vast lands of Eurasia, Norway and Japan have a lot in common. We are two democratic countries, with values and political aims that coincide. We support free trade, sustainable development, the rule of law, human rights and global access to health and education.

We both rely on the oceans for our welfare, and we agree on the need for sustainable and knowledge-based use of our natural resources. For centuries, harvesting from the vast resources of the blue economy has given us a deep-seated respect for the oceans, and an awareness of the responsibility we have toward future generations.

Our geographical similarities manifest themselves in common interests. With competence, and experience, we have found good partners within the industrial, economic, academic and cultural sectors — they are pillars of our bilateral relationship.

Over the past year, renewable energy, such as hydrogen and off-shore wind, sustainable fishing, medical technologies, polar and space research have all been the subjects of government-to-government contacts, seminars and joint activities that combine innovation, research and trade.

We work together on the topics of minorities and indigenous people, gender diversity and equality, and we work closely with the LGBTQ community. New books and translations are published, in Norway and in Japan. Artists, dancers, theater troupes, bands, photographers and poets are visiting, performing and making new contacts. We have seen Henrik Ibsen's plays performed in Japan and butoh danced in Norway.

People all over Japan engage deeply in Norwegian arts and culture. Harding fiddles, Hardanger embroidery, Norwegian language and Sami culture studies, poetry readings and friendship associations represent amazing insights and interest, in Norwegian traditional culture as well as innovative creativity.

Keeping all of this in mind, May 17, 2020, is not such a desolate prospect after all. The current pandemic situation reminds us strongly that we should cherish what we often take for granted. We are richly endowed with memories and imagination. We are connected, we are engaged, and we are close, even across the continents and seas.

Gratulerer med dagen! Congratulations on this day!

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



Aurora borealis — the northern lights — over Ersfjorden in the island of Kvaløya, a large island in the municipality of Tromsø in northern Norway

BJORN JORGENSEN/VISITNORWAY.COM



Parachuting over the mountains in Voss, a renowned center for extreme sports and outdoor life. The area hosts the annual Ekstremsportveko event and an innovation startup forum, Startup Extreme.

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Congratulations
on
the Norwegian
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