

Latvia National Day Special

Relations grow from strength to strength

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It is a great honor to address the readers of The Japan Times on the 102nd anniversary of the Republic of Latvia. On behalf of the people of Latvia and H.E. President Egils Levits, let me

express the deepest respect to Their Majesties Emperor Naruhito and Empress Masako and wish well-being and good health to the people of Japan.

Latvia was established on Nov. 18, 1918, and Japan was one of the first countries to recognize independent Latvia de facto on Jan. 10, 1919 and de jure on Jan. 26, 1921. Next year will be a special year in our relationship, as we will celebrate 100 years of friendship.

Latvia and Japan have long enjoyed a strong friendship and broad exchanges of culture and people. We are thankful for the close links with Japanese parliamentarians. Special gratitude goes to H.E. Hirofumi Nakasone, chairman of Japan-Latvia Parliamentary Cooperation Group, and its members who have promoted relations between both countries for many years.

Nowadays, Latvia is a regional startup hub, top exporter of information and com-

munication technology (ICT) services and the region's leader in drone engineering and manufacturing. Such Japanese companies as Fujitsu, NTT Communications and Sompo Holdings are using Latvia's ICT services. This year, Latvian UAV Factory drones started to operate over the Fukushima No. 1 reactor to monitor and research radiation levels. Proactive in forming a regional 5G ecosystem, Latvia holds the annual forum "5G Tehcitory" in Riga, which this year is supported by the Japan External Trade Organization and joined by distinguished speakers from Japan.

When the global pandemic started, Latvia acted quickly to advance digitalization and ensure that parliament, government and local municipalities have virtual sittings, children receive quality distance education and that people can work remotely. Latvia is among the European Union's top countries in digital transformation of public governance; currently, 80% of the Latvian population uses digital services provided by public institutions.

Though exchanges this year had to be postponed due to the pandemic, strong bonds unite our countries and people. The cooperation between sister cities Riga and Kobe and Higashikawa in Hokkaido and Rujiena are deepening.

The Mayor of Higashikawa, Ichiro Mat-suoka, was recently awarded the Latvian state award — Cross of Recognition — for his long-term contribution to the strength-

ening of Latvia-Japan relations. We are also thankful to have Higashikawa and the city of Fuji as host towns for our athletes ahead of the postponed Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games.

We are similarly grateful to the Kansai-Latvia Friendship Association in Osaka that has been promoting bilateral student exchanges for many years.

Latvia's culture is becoming more known in Japan. This year, three award-winning Latvian movies have joined the Japanese cinema — feature movies "The Rifleman" and "Bille," and the animation, "Away."

It is deeply appreciated that this year the government of Japan has decided to confer the Order of the Rising Sun on the distinguished Latvian composer, Raimonds Pauls. The Japanese version of his song "Davaja Marina" ("A Million Roses"), first performed by Tokiko Kato, has been for many years immensely popular in Japan.

In conclusion, let me express my gratitude to The Japan Times for providing the opportunity to publish this article. I would like to send my warmest greetings to all Latvians living in Japan. Let me also wish for an everlasting friendship and cooperation between our two countries, as well as good health for everyone.

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