
Latvia National Day Special

Democracy and freedom must be defended

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AMBASSADOR OF LATVIA



Dear readers of The Japan Times, it is my honor to address you for the first time in my capacity as ambassador.

On Nov. 18, the Republic of Latvia celebrates its 104th anniversary. On this day we pay tribute to all those who helped shape Latvia into the free, democratic and independent country it is today. We are grateful that we can celebrate our Independence Day as a member of the EU, NATO and OECD. This entails high political, economic and, above all, security standards.

Yet, this year's celebration in Latvia is different. On Feb. 24, we were reminded that freedom and democracy cannot be taken for granted. Sometimes we have to defend

it with weapons, as the Ukrainians are. By strengthening Ukraine, we strengthen ourselves. Latvia's aid to Ukraine amounts to almost 1% of our gross domestic product and we will continue supporting Ukraine as long as necessary. We deeply appreciate Japan's strong opposition to Russia's unprovoked war. I urge Japan, its government and people to continue supporting Ukraine with the same intensity as before.

During these challenging times, cooperation between like-minded partners like Latvia and Japan is increasingly important. We have maintained active political and economic dialogue, with this year's highlight being the visit of Latvia's Minister for Economics Ilze Indriksone in September. There were timely and productive discussions on issues such as energy, investments, trade and preparation for the 2025 World Expo in Osaka.

Despite the geographical distance there are striking similarities between our nations — we are hard-working, persistent,

and we value traditions and strive to live in harmony with nature. I was amazed to meet Japanese who study the Latvian language, practice Latvian traditional arts and sing Latvian songs. Our exchanges in culture have resumed, and in recent months, we have seen performances by Latvians, including Boston Symphony Orchestra conductor Andris Nelsons, violinist Gidon Kremer, opera singer Elina Garanca and the Latvia Radio Choir. We expect many more to come.

Dear readers, Japan is Latvia's most important partner in the region. Just last year Latvia and Japan celebrated the centennial of friendly relations. We are entering the second century of our friendship with a shared commitment to strengthened cooperation, mutual trust and support.

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