

Belgium king's day

Warm bilateral relations continue

Luc Liebaert
AMBASSADOR OF BELGIUM

This year's Belgian economic mission led by H.R.H. Prince Philippe, heir to the throne of Belgium, will remain a milestone in the recent bilateral relations between Belgium and Japan. H.R.H. Prince Philippe came to Japan from June 11 to 16 accompanied by a delegation of no less than four ministers and about 280 businessmen, officials and academics. The mission bridged a long gap as the last Belgian economic mission of similar size and purpose to visit Japan dated back to 2005 when H.R.H. Prince Philippe led an economic mission to Tokyo and Nagoya on the occasion of the Aichi World Expo. All companies, institutions and associations committed to the promotion of close ties between Belgium and Japan contributed to the success of the mission. I would like to express my gratitude to the Belgian and Japanese companies that gave H.R.H. Prince Philippe such a warm welcome during the economic mission; to the Japan-Belgium Society, the Belgian-Luxembourg Chamber of Commerce in Japan and the Belgo-Luxembourg Market Council; and to the Japanese authorities, the Foreign Ministry in the first place, for their efficient cooperation in organizing the mission.

The economic mission was deemed a huge success by the businessmen and academics

taking part in it. We are now witnessing the first impact on our bilateral trade relations, which have expanded considerably the last few years, notwithstanding the economic downturn we are experiencing in the euro-zone. Many Belgian companies who took part in the economic mission in June have already come back to Japan to explore further avenues of cooperation with Japanese companies.

This year's economic mission was also an opportunity for our country to highlight some of our strengths. The pharmaceutical industry and biotech companies are thriving in Belgium because of the quality of our universities, the favorable business climate, the support the government is providing to research and development (R&D) and our highly productive and qualified workforce. Information and communications technology (ICT), high-tech and nanotech companies also benefit from a Belgian business environment open to cooperation, with private or other partners, from Europe or the world. The logistics sector, a traditionally strong sector of the Belgian economy, has attracted many Japanese companies to Belgium. Finally, the picture would not be complete without mentioning the sector of quality consumer goods, which are contributing strongly to the image of Belgium as a country of exquisite food and refined lifestyle.

Politically, the bilateral meeting of Belgian Minister of Foreign Affairs Didier Reynders with his Japanese counterpart, Koichiro Genba, which took place on June 13 on the sidelines of the

economic mission, was a concrete opportunity to reaffirm the excellent relations between our two countries.

The meeting allowed the Belgian foreign minister to express his gratitude for the active role Japan is playing in the framework of the Bretton Woods institutions (World Bank and International Monetary Fund), the Group of Eight and the Group of 20, decisively contributing to prevent a global economic downturn. Moreover, Minister Reynders confirmed to his Japanese counterpart that the Belgian government is strongly in favor of the opening of negotiations on a free trade agreement between Japan and the European Union. Belgium favors the conclusion of an ambitious, comprehensive FTA that would tackle both the issue of the elimination of tariffs and the removal of non-tariff barriers, and that would also provide for a greater harmonization of regulations and standards.

However, this 2012 economic mission was not only about trade, investment relations, academic cooperation and bilateral ministerial meetings. The warm ties of friendship between the Japanese and Belgian reigning families were reinforced as Their Royal Highnesses Prince Philippe and Princess Mathilde were kindly received by Their Imperial Majesties Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko and met with Their Imperial Highnesses Crown Prince Naruhito and Princess Masako and Prince and Princess Hitachi. The traditionally warm relationship between the royal family of Belgium and the Imperial family of



Long-standing relations: Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko welcome Crown Prince Philippe and Princess Mathilde to the Imperial Court on June 12 during the latter couple's visit to Japan on an economic mission. KYODO

Japan is being passed to the next generation.

When it comes to global issues, development cooperation and human rights across the world, Belgium and Japan often have almost identical positions. In July, Japan hosted the Tokyo Conference on Afghanistan, which laid important benchmarks to assess how the Afghan government will progress toward stabilization and development. This year, Japan also hosted the Annual Meetings of the IMF and the World Bank Group, with an unparalleled sense of organizational hospitality. Drawing lessons from the Great East Japan Earthquake of March 2011, Japan shared important conclusions on disaster risk mitigation at the Sendai Ministerial Conference hosted by the government

of Japan and the World Bank as a part of the IMF-WBG Annual Meetings program.

Culture has always been an important aspect of the relations between Japan and Belgium. At this moment, two important exhibitions of some of the most well-known Belgian artists of the late 19th and early 20th century are still touring Japan: an exhibition of James Ensor and one of Paul Delvaux. In another artistic genre, music, Arsenal, Marka, Roland and Pieter Jan De Smet, entertained the crowds at the five-day event dedicated to Belgian beer, the Belgian Beer Weekend, which has become a yearly tradition in Tokyo and Osaka. The Belgian Beer Weekends have become the flagship event for the promotion of Belgian beer and food in Japan. In



Royal pair: King Albert II and Queen Paola of Belgium attend the wedding of Luxembourg's heir, Prince Guillaume, and Countess Stephanie at the Royal Palace in Luxembourg on Oct. 19. AP



Constitutional monarchy: The Belgian Senate is one of the hearts of the country's federal legislative power. CHRISTINE BASTIN AND JACQUES EVRARD / FPSFA

New Flemish experiences await in Bruges, Antwerp

Historium in Bruges

Bruges is set to become an even more attractive tourist destination with the launch of Historium, officially opening Nov. 25. The concept of Historium is not that of a museum but of a multimedia experience center where visitors make a fascinating journey to the distant past, to the glorious world of Bruges in the year 1435. When you visit Historium, you step into a time machine that transports you to the streets of medieval Bruges where snowflakes are gently falling, to the bustle of a world seaport, to the studio of the painter Jan Van Eyck. Film clips, beautiful decor, a compelling love story, special effects and atmospheric music all combine to create a unique total experience.

Historium is destined to be a success not only on account of

the content and historical setting but also due to its fantastic location on the old market square of Bruges. There could not be a better location given that the 600-year-old story portrayed in Historium took place exactly on this spot. Furthermore, the close cooperation of the Tourism Office for Flanders, Toerisme Brugge and the tourist guide associations is a major asset. There will also be a Historium city walk that perfectly complements the visit to the experience center.

The Red Star Line Museum
On Sept. 27, 2013, the Red Star Line Museum will open in the historic warehouses of the Red Star Line shipping company in Antwerp.

From 1800 onward, millions of people took the ships sailing from Europe for the United

States with all their belongings packed in just a few trunks. This new world is the promised land for all those in search of happiness and a better life. For many people, life in the U.S. and Canada actually began in a warehouse in the port of Antwerp.

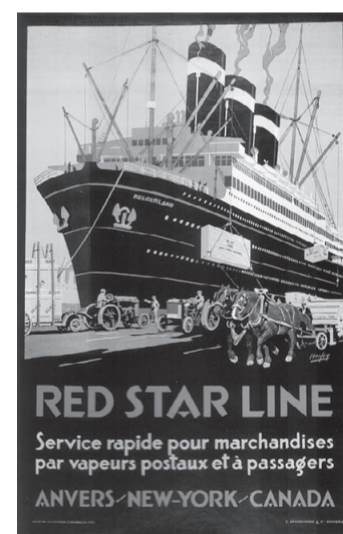
Between 1873 and 1934 the ocean liners from the Red Star Line sailed to the U.S. with more than 2 million adventurers and fortune-hunters on board.

The Red Star Line Museum tells the story of millions of Europeans who had the courage to leave everything behind and go away, in search of happiness and a better life. It is a story of high expectations and huge disappointments, a story about adrenaline and sleepless nights. In the old buildings of the shipping company all these emotions and stories are tangible and visible.

The Red Star Line Museum does not bury itself in the past. Migration is a universal phenomenon and it is of all times, most certainly today and most certainly in a port city.

In the museum you learn about the city in a different perspective. You walk in the footsteps of people that could have been, or maybe are, your ancestors. You are invited to linger for a while on a certain idea. Antwerp, and by expansion any place in the world, is what it is today because of the people that once lived there. And the future of the city is being shaped by the people who inhabit it today.

Information provided by the Tourist Office for Flanders-Brussels. For more information, visit www.visitflanders.com.



Opening soon: A poster of the Red Star Line, whose historic warehouses in Antwerp will reopen as a museum on Sept. 27, 2013. RED STAR LINE MUSEUM ANTWERP



Enthusiasm: Next year on May 25 will be exactly 100 years since the first Tour of Flanders. The region is planning celebrations, exhibitions, events and new cycling routes. H.A. ROTH-FOTO

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Belgium king's day

Close bilateral ties prospering

Takao Kusakari
PRESIDENT, JAPAN-BELGIUM SOCIETY

On the occasion of the Kingdom of Belgium's King's Day, I extend my heartfelt congratulations on behalf of the Japan-Belgium Society.



It is indeed a matter for rejoicing that His Majesty King Albert II, Her Majesty Queen Paola and the royal family of Belgium are in good health.

I am pleased to note that Japan

and Belgium have long enjoyed very close relations not only in the economic, political and diplomatic realms, but also in the cultural and social spheres. It goes without saying that this excellent relationship is based on more than 80 years of good and stable exchanges between Japan's Imperial family and the royal family of the Kingdom of Belgium.

In June, the Belgian Economic Mission, presided over by H.R.H. Prince Philippe, visited Japan. The mission, the largest Belgian delegation to Japan since 2005, successfully played an important role in promoting bilateral

economic activities between Belgium and Japan.

Also, H.R.H. Princess Mathilde traveled to the region devastated by the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami. Her visit very much encouraged and cheered up those who had lost loved ones and homes, and we truly appreciate the efforts she made.

I sincerely pray for the greater prosperity of the Kingdom of Belgium, which is playing an increasingly important role in the European Union.

I also pray for the everlasting bonds of friendship between Japan and Belgium.

UNESCO World Heritage sites in Wallonia

There are seven grand belfries in the south of Belgium in the Wallonia region registered on the list of UNESCO World Heritage sites. Belfries were built as symbols of a municipality around the 11th to 17th centuries. They became a symbol of the power and prosperity of the city.

Four mines (the Grand-Hornu, Bois-du-Luc, the Bois du Cazier, Blegny-Mine) were registered as World Heritage sites in July 2012. As the Wallonia region was a major coal production area, the region supported the development and rise of modern industry in Belgium in the 19th and 20th centuries. It is not an exaggeration to say that the foundation of present Belgium owes itself to the Wallonia region's coal industry. The four mines preserve the daily life of a mine worker and this is the key point to them being World Heritage sites.

The region of Mons, where Grand-Hornu is located, has been designated as a European Capital of Culture for 2015. Mons intends to open six new museums and a new railway station will be constructed.

Mons is also known for the Ducasse de Mons, listed as a



Cultural heritages: The Bois du Cazier is one of the four best preserved places of coal mining in Belgium. Below, the Ducasse de Mons is a popular festival featuring the procession of St. George. G.FOCANT-SPW, OPT.J.JEANMART



UNESCO intangible heritage.

Information provided by the Belgian Tourist Office for

Brussels and Wallonia. For more information, visit www.belgium-travel.jp.



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on the Belgian King's Day

The Japan – Belgium Society

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