

Belgium king's day

A year of milestones for Belgium-Japan relations

Luc Liebaut
AMBASSADOR OF BELGIUM

Looking back upon 2013, I see three milestones that marked the past year, and will shape the future of the relations between Belgium and Japan.

The first milestone was the launch, in April this year, of negotiations for both a free-trade agreement (FTA) and a strategic partnership agreement (SPA) between the European Union and Japan. Belgium strongly supported these developments.

A successful conclusion of the SPA will pave the way for closer political and global economic cooperation both bilaterally, regionally and multilaterally between Japan and the EU. This is a natural development, as our societies are built on the shared values of democracy, political pluralism, rule of law, market economy and respect for basic

human rights, and as we jointly defend and promote these common values in our foreign policies. It will allow Japan and the EU to better join their efforts to contribute to peace, stability and prosperity around the world, and to work more closely together in addressing crises and key global challenges through practical cooperation in issues such as disaster relief, humanitarian assistance, development, climate change, the peaceful use of nuclear energy, nonproliferation, cybersecurity and counter-piracy.

As for the FTA, we hope that the negotiations will lead to the conclusion of an ambitious and comprehensive agreement that will almost fully liberalize trade, eliminate nontariff barriers and lead to a high degree of harmonization of standards, and other trade-related rules and regulations.

The second milestone of 2013 was the joint political declaration by Japan and NATO that was signed in April by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and by

NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen in Tokyo. This document opens the road to a new cooperative relationship, which Belgium, as one of the 12 "founding fathers" that signed the North Atlantic Alliance Treaty, full-heartedly welcomes.

Finally, the third key event of 2013 was the abdication of King Albert II, King of the Belgians (the official title of the Belgian kings) since 1993, in favor of his son, Philippe. On July 3, 2013, in an emotional, publicly broadcast intervention, King Albert II announced that ill health was preventing him from continuing to discharge his duties to his full satisfaction and that therefore the time had come to renounce the throne. On July 21, Crown Prince Philippe was sworn in as the new King of the Belgians. King Philippe is the seventh monarch in Belgium's history.

In Belgium, the first steps of a new monarch traditionally include visits to the capitals of all the Belgian provinces. This tradition, called "blijde intredes" in Dutch or "joyeuses entrées"

in French, has been respected since 1831. From September onward, King Philippe and Queen Mathilde have embarked on this series of visits, each one of them made up of meetings with the provincial authorities and with the mayors of all the municipalities of the province, and of popular festivities in honor of the new king and queen.

Like his father, King Philippe knows Japan and its Imperial family well. Our new king has visited Japan numerous times, officially and privately. His last official visit dates back to June 2012. At that time he visited Tokyo, Osaka and Kyoto at the helm of the most important Belgian Economic Mission (280 businessmen and academicians) ever to visit Japan. It is the firm wish of King Philippe and Queen Mathilde that the relations of warm friendship between the Imperial House of Japan and the Royal House of Belgium, inherited from previous generations, as well as between Japan and Belgium, be maintained and further developed.

The year 2013 was a good year in the development of Belgium's trade and cultural relations with Japan.

Building on the new impetus provided by the economic mission of June 2012, our bilateral trade relations continued to develop positively, notwithstanding the economic woes of the euro-zone. In 2012, Belgian exports grew strongly for a fifth consecutive year, reaching an all-time high of 3.8 billion euros. The results for the first months of 2013 confirm the upward trend.



Generation transition: (Above) Former King Albert II of Belgium (second right) and his wife Queen Paola; and new King Philippe of Belgium and his wife Queen Mathilde. King Albert abdicated in favor of his son Philippe on July 21. (Right) The official portrait of the new king and queen. CHANCERY OF THE PRIME MINISTER-PHOTOGRAPHER MICHEL GRONEMBERGER, MARIE-JO LAFONTAINE/MARINA COX

Moreover, investments have continued to expand. Japan, which was one of the top investors in Belgium owing to the presence of some 287 Japanese investments, directly employing more than 29,000 people, added some further ventures to its impressive investment record. Mitsubishi Chemicals, Sumitomo Corp., Dentsu Inc. and JSR Corp. top the list of this year's new Japanese investments in my country.

In the opposite direction, some of the leading Belgian investors in Japan continue to expand their presence. The year 2013 will see the opening of three new factories: by Callebaut NV (chocolate for professional use), ETEX NV, through its subsidiary Microtherm SA (insula-

tion material for the building industry), and Umicore SA (precious metals and components for electrical batteries for the car industry).

It has been a long time since Belgium could boast the opening of three new production facilities in Japan in a single year; this is a clear signal that Belgian companies are not giving up on Japan.

The year 2013 was also marked by a series of outstanding exhibitions of Belgian painters and artists, touring Japan for nearly a whole year. Works by famous 17th-century Baroque painter Rubens were shown in three different cities. Modern painters James Ensor (a precursor of modern painting with a peculiar style of his own), Paul Delvaux (a surrealist) and



Emile Claus (an impressionist) were also exhibited in Tokyo, and extensively toured Japan. And finally, contemporary artist Francis Alys, who was born in Belgium but has been living in Mexico for many years, was granted a double exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo, and at Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art. To finish, a word about the increasingly popular Belgian Beer Weekends (BBWs). Launched in 2010, they have grown, year after year, in size and popularity. This year, no less than five cities (Nagoya, Yokohama, Osaka, Fukuoka and Tokyo) were visited, attracting some 138,000 visitors. The combination of quality Belgian beers with Belgian live music (thus giving some of our promising modern bands the opportunity to make themselves known on the Japanese stage) and Belgian specialty dishes is clearly a formula for success that has turned the BBWs into by far the single most important Belgian promotion event in Japan.

A day to celebrate Belgium's new King Philippe

Takao Kusakari
PRESIDENT, JAPAN-BELGIUM SOCIETY



On the occasion of the Kingdom of Belgium's King's Day, I extend my heartfelt congratulations. This year, a new wind blew in the Kingdom of Belgium. On July 21, H.R.H. Crown Prince Philippe, who visited Japan last year, was sworn in as the seventh Belgian king, following the abdication of H.M. King Albert II. Therefore, marking the first Kingdom of Belgium's King's Day since the announcement of the newly crowned king, I am certain H.M. King Philippe will be congratulated greatly by the people of the Kingdom of Belgium.

Last June, the new king, then crown prince, met with Their Imperial Majesties Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko, and many other

members of the Imperial family. At the same time, presiding over the Belgian Economic Mission, he played an important role in promoting bilateral economic activities between the two countries. Also, then H.R.H. Crown Princess Mathilde traveled to the region devastated by the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami. Her visit encouraged and cheered up those who had lost loved ones and homes, and we truly appreciate the efforts she made.

Along with political and economic aspects, a wide variety of cultural exchange is also being made. We see Belgian cultural events being held in Japan every day. One such example would be the "Belgian Beer Weekend" that has become an immense platform in further promoting grass-roots cultural exchange between Japan and Belgium. This year, Fukuoka and Yokohama joined Tokyo, Osaka and Nagoya in hosting the event.

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

Soccer breaks down barriers between countries

Damien Dome
DIRECTOR, BELGIAN TOURIST OFFICE
WALLONIA-BRUSSELS INTOKYO

Last week, I received many calls from Japanese expatriates in Europe who wanted to know where they could get a Japanese Samurai team soccer uniform in Belgium.

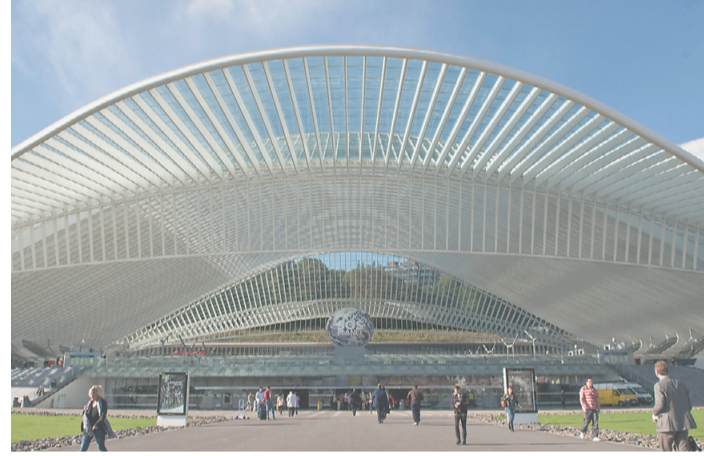
I first thought that it was a strange question and then I realized that my country will host two soccer games: Holland vs. Japan and then, Nov. 19, Belgium vs. Japan, which will take place in Brussels.

Today, the Belgian Red Devil team is a winning team and many of its players are stars abroad: The captain, Vincent Kompany, is also captain of Manchester City; Marouane Fellaini is playing with Shinji Kagawa at Manchester United; and Eden Hazard plays at Chelsea.

I am very proud of this multicultural part of the Red Devil team because it represents what Belgium is: a country open to the world.

In the Japanese team, Eiji Kawashima is the goalkeeper. Stay with me because this is where the story gets interesting: Kawashima is the goalkeeper of Standard Liège, where he plays with Red Devil Laurent Ciman. So you see, our two countries' teams know each other very well, so I am expecting a very exciting match Nov. 19.

Standard de Liège is very famous in Belgium. Its nickname is "Les Rouches," which means



Ancient and modern: (Above) Liege Guillemins is the main railway station of the city of Liege. (Above right) St. Barthelemy is the oldest religious construction in Liege, the exterior of which dates back to the 12th century. (Right) The city of Liege lies in the valley of the Meuse River. WBT-PASCALLE BEROUJON, WBT-J.P. REMY, O.T. LIEGE MARC VERPOORTEN

washima is the goalkeeper of Standard Liège, where he plays with Red Devil Laurent Ciman. So you see, our two countries' teams know each other very well, so I am expecting a very exciting match Nov. 19.

Standard de Liège is very famous in Belgium. Its nickname is "Les Rouches," which means

the "Reds," but with a Liège accent typical of the French that inspires a warm and quiet welcome. Standard's fans have a reputation of dedication, eccentricity and fun. Liège people are indeed quite proud of their city. Today, the new station, designed by Santiago Calatrava, has become a symbol of the citizen's



dynamics: pride, eccentricity and enjoying time together.

You might not be able to go to Belgium to support the Japanese Samurai, but you can always enjoy

our warm welcome when you visit Liège and bring your support to Standard's goalkeeper!

For more information, visit <http://belgium-travel.jp>

Congratulations on the Belgian King's Day

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Flanders art and seasonal fare

New museum opening
The Musée Fin-de-Siècle Museum will open Dec. 6 in Brussels, which was one of the artistic capitals of the late 19th century with exhibitions of Les XX and La Libre Esthétique between 1884 and 1914.

The museum will be distinguished by its multidisciplinary

nature, through a partnership formed with the Royal Library, the Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie, the Royal Museums of Art and History, Cinematek, the Bibliotheca Wittrockiana, the King Baudouin Foundation and the Brussels Capital Region for housing the Gillion Crowet Collection, which will be one of the

museum's highlights.

The museum's art historians have set out to create multidisciplinary sensory experiences, such as guided tours combined with discovery trails exploring art nouveau architecture in Brussels and "sound showers" using the latest museum technology, which will allow visitors to make discoveries that are not merely intellectual but also creative.

For more information, visit <http://www.fine-arts-museum.be/en/museums/musee-fin-de-siecle-museum>
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Christmas in Brugge
VISITFLANDERS

Belgium king's day



Holiday fare: A Christmas market with around 250 stalls and a Christmas tree on the Grand-Place in Brussels WWW.MILO-PROFIBE

Flanders art and seasonal fare

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Christmas markets

The holiday season will again be celebrated with colorful Christmas trees and busy Christmas markets offering all kinds of goodies. Ice rinks, carol concerts and plenty of events will ensure a wonderful Christmas time.

In the capital Brussels, there will be a Christmas market with around 250 stalls, fairground attractions, a 1,050-sq.-meter ice rink with a Winter Cafe and Christmas tree, and a light show on the Grand-Place.

In Brugge, besides a Christmas market, there will be special

events, such as a Snow and Ice Sculpture Festival (Nov. 22-Jan. 5), Winter Moments with Flowers (Nov. 22-Dec. 1) and December Dance (Dec. 4-15).

Also, various Christmas markets featuring regional specialties and special events will be held throughout Flanders, including Antwerp, Ghent, Hasselt, Leuven, Mechelen, Ostend and Ypres from late November through December.

Information provided by Visit Flanders / Tourist Office for Flanders-Brussels.

For more information, visit www.visitflanders.com.



Christmas in Antwerp ANTWERPENTOEERISME & CONGRES

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to the People
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