

## Belgium king's day

## Sharing similar economic, social, political values

Luc Liebaut  
AMBASSADOR OF BELGIUM

Looking back upon 2014, the most important development in the bilateral relations between Japan and Belgium was undoubtedly the visit of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to Belgium on May 6 and 7, a visit that was organized back-to-back with the 2014 EU-Japan Summit and with meetings of the prime minister at NATO.

The visit allowed both prime ministers to compare notes on a wide range of international issues, to discuss the future of relations between Japan and the European Union and to review thoroughly the state of play of our bilateral relations.

Japan and Belgium (and, in a larger scope, the European Union as Belgium's foreign policy is largely conducted in the framework of the Common Foreign and Security Policy of the European Union) are united by the shared values on which our societies, our economies and our political systems are based. These values also lie at the heart of our foreign policies.

The meeting between the two prime ministers confirmed — once again, I would say — that both our countries have convergent, even almost identical views with regard to the different global challenges and regional issues we are confronted with.

Whether we discuss the issues of the Ukraine or Mali, or the territorial disputes and maritime tensions in East-Asia or in the South China Sea, both our countries systematically call for dialogue, mutual respect and negotiations, as well as for the respect of international law while resolutely rejecting coercion, the use of force and attempts to unilaterally impose changes on the ground.

At the same time, the Belgian prime minister welcomed the determination of the Abe administration to proactively contribute to peace and stability; a development that opens promising perspectives for closer cooperation between Japan and Belgium/the European Union, including in peacekeeping operations.

Japan and the European Union also share the determination to build a strengthened relationship, the legal basis of which will be both the "Strategic Partnership Agreement"



King Philippe (center) and Queen Mathilde, former King Albert (fourth right) and Queen Paola with Royal family members CHANCERY OF THE PRIME MINISTER-PHOTOGRAPHER: MICHEL GRONEMBERGER

and "Free Trade Agreement" (FTA). Belgium, too, is of the opinion that the negotiations are progressing well and that they could lead to a successful conclusion in 2015 provided, of course, that the scope and the level of ambition of the agreements are not downgraded.

Whereas the SPA should pave the way for closer political, security and global economic cooperation and a better

promotion of our common rules on the world scene, the FTA should allow us to almost fully liberalize trade in goods and services, to eliminate non-tariff barriers and achieve a high degree of harmonization of standards and other trade-related rules and regulations.

Our bilateral relations are characterized by long-standing political relations of friendship and trust; a dense network of cultural and scientific cooperation and exchanges; a strong

presence of Japanese companies in Belgium and a sizable presence of Belgian companies in Japan; a high-level of trade; and relations of warm friendship between the Imperial House of Japan and the Royal House of Belgium, inherited from previous generations and cherished and matured by His Majesty Emperor Akihito and His Majesty King Philippe, King of the Belgians.

Both prime ministers positively evaluated the present

state of our bilateral relations and decided to give them a new impetus in the run-up to 2016, the year in which we will celebrate the 150th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Belgium and Japan.

Short-term action will focus on the political and economic field with a visit of the Belgian prime minister to Japan in the first months of 2015, a modernization of the legal framework in the economic field and the organization of a seminar in Tokyo to stimulate Japanese investments in Belgium and Belgian investments in Japan.

Notwithstanding the slow pace of the economic recovery in Europe, Belgium remains an attractive destination for Japanese investors. In this regard, it should be noted that — owing to new investments in the energy and service sectors — the number of Japanese investments in Belgium recently increased to over 300 companies employing more than 29,000 people.

In closing, a word about the increasingly popular Belgian Beer Weekends (BBWs) or Belgian Festivals, which were launched in 2010. These have grown, year after year, in size

## Fostering long-term relationship

Takao Kusakari  
PRESIDENT, JAPAN-BELGIUM SOCIETY

It is with great pleasure that we celebrate another anniversary of the King's Day of Belgium. This year, there were no particular events between the Belgian Royal family and the Japanese Imperial family, but both countries have been further deepening their close relationship through many exchanges, not only in politics and the economy, but also in culture, art, music, education and sports.

It is no exaggeration to say that Japan sees Belgium-related events taking place every day somewhere in the nation. One such example would be the "Belgian Beer Weekends" that have become significant opportunities to promote a grass-roots cultural exchange between Japan and Belgium. This year, Sendai has joined Tokyo, Osaka, Nagoya, Fukuoka and Yokohama in hosting the events.

In 2016, Japan and Belgium will celebrate the 150th anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Friendship and Commerce. Diplomatic relations between the two countries thus started at the end of the Edo period. However, the record of the first Belgian's visit to Japan goes back even further to the time of Toyotomi Hideyoshi, when a Belgian missionary set foot on Japanese soil in 1588.

Japan and Belgium have built close and friendly relations over the years and I sincerely hope the upcoming major milestone will lead both countries to further develop their friendship.



## Mons 2015, European capital of culture

Damien Dome  
DIRECTOR, BELGIAN TOURIST OFFICE  
WALLONIA-BRUSSELS IN TOKYO

The city of Mons, only 50 minutes by train from Brussels, possesses numerous listed sites such as a singular monument, and the symbol of Mons, the belfry, which was built in the 17th century and is a UNESCO World Heritage site, city hall or the Sainte-Waudru collegiate treasure.

Every year — May 31 in 2015 — Mons and its Grand Place are the main stage for a remarkable folklore event: The Ducasse de Mons, or Doudou, is a popular festival that originated in the Middle Ages. There are four key episodes: The descent of the shrine holding the relics of the Holy Lady

Waudru, The Procession, The Ascent of the Golden Chariot and a re-enactment of combat known as the Lumeçon. It has been recognized by UNESCO as an Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity since November 2005.

Mons 2015's theme, "Where technology meets culture," will be a bridge between the city's past cultural heritage and its future development in the field of digital arts, in which the town is a world leader.

Many events will take place in 2015 such as the "Van Gogh in the Borinage, the birth of an artist" exhibition. During his stay of almost two years in Mons, Van Gogh ended his career as a clergyman by choosing the life of an artist (Jan. 24 to May 17). Also, the "Verlaine,



Grand Place (above) and the belfry in the city of Mons VISITMONS, GREGORY MATHELOT/WBT, JP REMY

Cell No. 2, Poetic turbulence" exhibition will examine numerous unseen objects and previously unseen works of Paul Verlaine, one of the most talented French Poets, who was imprisoned in Mons after a rift with Arthur Rimbaud (March 14 to June 14).

For more information, visit [www.belgium-travel.jp](http://www.belgium-travel.jp) or [www.mons2015.eu](http://www.mons2015.eu)



## Flanders: Center of art, cycling heritage

## Art exhibitions

In the spring of 2015, a unique exhibition on Peter Paul Rubens, "Rubens in private," which runs from March 28 to June 28, will present portraits of Rubens' family members and relatives. These works were not commissioned, but were a labor of love and are the most beautiful and intimate paintings Rubens ever created. Next year, these stunning portraits will be returning to his former home in Antwerp for the first time.

Since January 2010, the Cathedral of Our Lady in Antwerp has become a treasure trove of religious art as the prestigious exhibition "Reunion, From Quinten Metsys to Peter Paul Rubens. Masterpieces from the Royal Museum Back in the Cathedral," is ongoing through 2017.

Organized by the cathedral and the Royal Museum of Fine Arts Antwerp, eight monumental altarpieces painted and carved by celebrated masters



Self-portrait by Peter Paul Rubens ANTWERPEN RUBENSHUIS COLLECTIEBELEID

shine in the setting for which they were originally created.

## Cycling in Flanders

Flanders is an all-in cycling destination. For everyone from hard-core cyclists to passionate supporters, the "Cycling in Flanders" website (<http://cycling-in-flanders.com>) provides an all encompassing platform to discover Flanders' cycling culture, sharing the little-known secrets, including cycling paths and events.



The annual "Ronde van Vlaanderen," or Tour of Flanders will take place on April 5 in 2015. PATRICK VERHOEST

Among the highlights is the annual Tour of Flanders, which will take place on April 5 in 2015. On April 4, the day before

the tour, thousands of cycling tourists will be able to cycle the course themselves.

Information provided by Visit Flanders/Tourist Office for Flanders & Brussels, Belgium. For more information, visit [www.visitflanders.com](http://www.visitflanders.com).

## Congratulations on the Belgian King's Day

Belgian Restaurant



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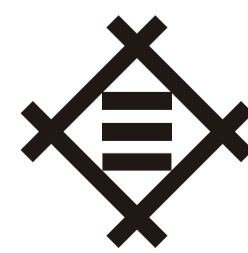
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