

Switzerland National Day

Cooperation strengthened in all key areas

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I am delighted to greet the readers of The Japan Times on the occasion of Swiss National Day, which commemorates the birth of the Swiss Confederation

726 years ago. Japan and Switzerland are quite different in size, as Japan is nine times bigger than Switzerland and its population is 15 times larger. However, in terms of values and interests, both countries have much in common.

Not only are the Swiss and the Japanese very much like-minded on safety, precision, reliability and environmental friendliness, Japan is also one of our most trusted partners in strategic areas such as business and international affairs, innovation and technology, as well as cultural and creative industries.

6th-largest foreign investor

Thanks to considerable investment by Swiss companies, Switzerland remained in 2016

the sixth-largest foreign investor in Japan for the fourth consecutive year. Since 2009, the exchanges between both nations have benefitted from a free trade and economic partnership agreement (FTA). This was the first FTA deal beyond the Asia-Pacific zone for Japan, and the most important one signed by Switzerland since its agreement with the European Communities in 1972. Today nearly all major Swiss companies are present in Japan, represented in the health care, food and luxury goods markets, as well as in the manufacturing, finance and service sectors, among others.

The intensive bilateral visits between the two countries have continued to flourish during the first half of 2017. A special highlight was the first official visit to Japan by the Switzerland-Japan Parliamentary Friendship Group in March. The group, founded in 2014 amid celebrations for the 150th anniversary of the establishment of our diplomatic relations, followed an official invitation from the president of the House of Representatives of the Diet. The delegation's rich program had a strong economic focus, and included visits to the factories of Straumann, a global Swiss dentistry leader, and Nestle, the world's larg-

est food and beverage company.

Robotics and bioengineering

Excellence in scientific research is another point of convergence. Following a visit to Switzerland by a delegation from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, both countries signed a declaration aimed at fostering closer and simplified direct cooperation between the research funding agencies of both countries.

On the innovation front, MEDTEC Japan, Asia's largest trade show dedicated to medical devices, provided an opportunity to showcase Cybathlon, an international competition for individuals with physical disabilities assisted by the latest technologies, including robotics and bioengineering. In 2016, three Japanese teams traveled to Zurich to participate in the first competition. Through Cybathlon, cutting-edge technologies such as powered prosthetic arms or powered exoskeletons help enhance the social integration of people with disabilities. The competition will return in 2020. On the road to the upcoming Olympic and Paralympic Games in Tokyo, Switzerland is keen on nurturing the global conversation on



social inclusion, environmental policy, smart energy and clean tech.

Art all around

The fascinating exhibition dedicated to Alberto Giacometti in Tokyo this summer very much captures the intensity of the cultural exchanges between Japan and Switzerland. The elongated silhouettes of the Swiss sculptor have been chosen to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the National Art Center, with a focus on the artist's relationship with the Japanese philosopher Isaku Yanaihara. In November, the Bejart Ballet Lausanne and the Tokyo Ballet are pursuing their long-lasting arrangement with a series of performances at Tokyo Bunka Kaikan. The Lucerne Festival Orchestra shall make a much-awaited return to Suntory Hall and the Montreux Jazz Festival Japan will fill Ebisu Garden Hall with an edgy, finely curated lineup.

The Dragon Ride aerial cableway between Fraekmuendegg and Pilatus offers breathtaking views of Lake Lucerne.

PILATUS BAHNEN /
SWISS TRAVEL SYSTEM
(SWISS-IMAGE.CH /
URS WYSS)

Congratulations
to the People
of
Switzerland
on the Occasion
of
Their National Day



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