

Finland Independence Day

Increased cooperation across many areas

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This year, the 100th Anniversary of Finland's Sovereignty has been celebrated with great success in my country, as well as here in Japan. We have chosen the theme "together" for the year to be able to

strengthen ties with the numerous friends of Finland around the world. The festivities will culminate on Dec. 6, which was the date when the parliament of Finland approved the Declaration of Independence in 1917.

Now that the centenary celebrations are close to finishing, it is a good moment to look into the future and plan what the next few years will bring for Japanese-Finnish relations. When President Sauli Niinisto visited Tokyo in March 2016, he and Prime Minister Shinzo Abe agreed upon a strategic partnership between the two countries. The implementation of the partnership is now well underway and the cooperation extends

to several different areas.

A high priority for both Finland and Japan is increasing business contacts. This year, bilateral trade is growing again in both directions and investments are also on the rise, especially from Japan to Finland. The strategic partnership places high importance on the internationalization of companies from both countries, especially new ways of cooperation between small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

The jointly identified focus areas are digitalization and open innovation, especially in sectors like smart cities, digital health, maritime and arctic expertise, as well as education. We also have many possibilities to complement each other's know-how in the circular economy, food industry and the new space economy.

The implementing agencies of the economic partnership, the Japan External Trade Organization and our own Finpro, use various tools to bring SMEs together. In addition to special theme days, like the Japan Day in Helsinki last May, "hack-athons" are organized for the vibrant start-up companies. In the future, Finland and Japan will increasingly act as base camps for each other's

innovative companies offering easy market access in Europe and Asia.

Japan and Finland are at the forefront of developing mobile 5G technologies. Their use in sectors such as health and social care, transportation and energy networks offers exciting possibilities, not only from the viewpoint of private companies, but also for society at large. Finland is therefore happy to cooperate with Japan in the frameworks of connected industries and the "Society 5.0" initiative.

The increasing contacts are of course not limited to businesses only. The research and science communities are enhancing their dialogue and cooperation. In June a memorandum of understanding was signed between Japan's National Institute of Science and Technology Policy and Finland's Tekes, and delegations from many other Japanese research organizations have visited my country.

As the Finnish Institute in Japan celebrates 20 years of existence in 2018, special attention will be given to cooperation between universities. Researcher, teacher and student exchanges are an excellent way to build new generations of Finnish-Japanese contacts. To facilitate the mobility of people, we also aim to conclude negotiations for a social security



agreement very soon.

There are also cultural ties. Finland has over 20 friendship associations and societies in Japan. Their activities, often together with friends of Japan in Finland, create a busy two-way bridge between the countries. We are privileged to have Finnair and JAL with their 30-plus weekly flights to transport visitors in both directions. When 100 years of Japanese-Finnish diplomatic relations are celebrated in 2019, both companies will certainly be kept busy, as tourism numbers are also on a fast growth path.

It can safely be said that the years leading up to the 2020 Tokyo Olympics will be an extremely good and intense period for cooperation between Finland and Japan. I see no reason why that positive togetherness could not continue during the whole second century of Finnish independence.

Helsinki Cathedral is a landmark in the country's capital.
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Congratulations

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100th Anniversary of Independence



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