

# Belgian King's Day

PUBLICITY

## Belgium, Japan share common strengths

By Antoine Evrard  
Ambassador of Belgium to Japan

On Nov. 15, Belgium celebrates King's Day. On this day, Belgian institutions and citizens pay tribute to His Majesty the King. Belgium has been celebrating King's Day since 1866, which also happens to be the official starting year of diplomatic relations between Japan and Belgium. It is therefore an excellent occasion to bring together Belgium's many Japanese friends.



Antoine Evrard

But it is at the same time a moment to reflect, to consider the challenges we are facing, our strengths and our partnerships. Regrettably, the international situation has not been forthcoming. Russia's aggression against Ukraine is continuing, undermining the fundamentals of the international rules based order and causing tremendous damage and human suffering. War is raging again in the Middle East as well, with innocent civilians the first victims. Tensions in the Indo-Pacific region are also at risk of rising. And of course, on the eve of COP28, the threat of climate change is becoming more visible to us all.

It is clear that no one can face these challenges alone, and Japan and Belgium are ready to play their part. We share the same values and a firm belief in international cooperation and the multilateral system. As Japan's very successful presidency of the G7 comes to its end, Belgium will take the reins for the rotating presidency of the European Union, for the first half of 2024.

These developments might seem abstract, but they impact the direct exchanges between Japan and Belgium. The need to diversify supply chains, for instance, has created the basis for our companies working together on semiconductors. The COVID pandemic has given a boost to health care cooperation. And the priority given to climate commitments in Japan,

Belgium and the EU has led to mutual collaboration on offshore wind, hydrogen and waste management.

Sustainable development was also the focus of the Belgian Economic Mission to Japan, led by H.R.H. Princess Astrid in December last year. It brought a record 575 participants to Tokyo, Nagoya, Osaka and Kyoto: companies in a wide range of sectors, business federations, universities, cultural actors and of course official representatives from the Belgian federal government and the country's three regions. Our Embassy is working intensively to follow-up on the many projects that this Mission brought about.

And another major event is already on the horizon. Belgium is fully engaged to participate at the Osaka 2025 world exhibition. We are ready to contribute to Japan's success. We are on track in developing our pavilion, which will showcase Belgium as a global leader in life sciences. Thanks to the collaboration between our universities, research centers, private pharmaceutical companies and public authorities, many startups are feeding this booming sector in Belgium. More than 600 companies in the biotechnology sector are creating an industrial dynamic focused on innovation, with around 98 billion euros in exports and 5.3 billion euros in investments in research and development.

Academic cooperation between Japan and Belgium is also thriving. Dozens of partnerships between our universities stimulate exchanges among researchers and students on both sides. Later this month we will organize an event to highlight these university partnerships. We see that the end of the pandemic has brought back many Japanese students to Belgium – and vice versa. They have made an excellent choice. Belgium counts the highest number of educational institutions per capita among the top 100 most innovative universities in Europe. Our universities also take up leading positions in global rankings.

Furthermore, we are keen on continuing



The Grand Place in Brussels, a UNESCO World Heritage site

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our exchanges with Japan on other levels as well. Showcasing our rich cultural heritage and contemporary artistic creativity is but one example. In the second half of this year, we have seen activities around historical cooperation in visual arts and music, for instance. Promoting tourism is another point of interest, given all the historic

sights, landmarks and gastronomic experiences both our countries have on offer. But I am also thinking about discussing and exchanging best practices on such important topics as gender equality and diversity.

Every day I am struck by the variety and energy in our bilateral relationship. This is only possible thanks to the creativity and

engagement of passionate people from both sides. They are the driving force and the target of our success. Our Embassy and I will continue to support them, so that we can address the challenges we are facing based on our common strengths and values.

I wish you all a Happy King's Day!



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Belgian King Philippe and Queen Mathilde with their four children

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