

Belgian King's Day

Publicity

Belgium, Japan enjoying excellent ties

By Roxane de Bilderling
Ambassador of the Kingdom of Belgium

It is a great pleasure for me to celebrate my first King's Day in Tokyo as the Belgian ambassador since recently arriving in this country. I feel really honored to be posted in Japan as our two countries enjoy excellent, friendly, rich and diverse bilateral relations. This was again reflected when Their Majesties the King and the Queen of the Belgians traveled to Tokyo to attend the enthronement ceremonies and reaffirm the strong bonds that unite them to Their Majesties the Emperor and Empress of Japan. The links between the two families date back several decades.



Roxane de Bilderling

For many Japanese people, the first word to come to their mind when thinking about Belgium might be chocolate, with several excellent Belgian brands present on the Japanese market, or it might also be the waffles, or of course the many delicious Belgian beers present in Japan (actually not so many if you realize that a small country like Belgium has thousands of types of beers).

Some might also know Belgium for its diamonds, as our country hosts an international center where no less than 80 percent of rough diamonds pass at some point in their cycle. As Japan is known for manga and anime, Belgium is known for its comic strips, many of which have been translated into Japanese.

All of this is true, but it is as important to point out that Belgium is most of all a moderately sized multicultural country, at the heart of Europe. It represents a kind of condensed summary of various cultural influences. Throughout history, many powers have occupied the land where Belgium now stands, which gave us this unique openness, modesty, pragmatism and a certain gift for finding compromise, helping to find solutions.

This might be the reason why our



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Their Majesties the King and the Queen of the Belgians greet Their Majesties the Emperor and Empress on the occasion of the Emperor's enthronement ceremonies in Tokyo on Oct. 22.

country hosts at least two important organizations for Japan: the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). It also convinced us of the true need to build an international order based on rules, on respect and multilateral agreements, a firm belief which we share with Japan.

We cherish our more than 150 years of friendship with Japan and the long-term partnership we have established. In a complex security environment, where human rights are severely attacked and multilateralism is under pressure, it is all the more important to continue to develop our alliance and team up as like-minded countries when it comes to defending peace, security and stability. Belgium will pursue its mandate as a nonpermanent member of the United Nations Security Council in 2020 and will continue to work with various countries, including Japan, to further promote these ob-

jectives.

Japan has been at the forefront of many high-level international events these last few months, including the Group of 20 Summit in Osaka and the Seventh Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD7) in Yokohama. On these occasions, attention has been drawn on Japan's Indo-Pacific strategy as well as on its specific approach to Africa focused on private investments, quality infrastructure and debt sustainability. Belgium also has long-standing cooperation with the African continent that could offer further food for exchanges.

We also specifically look forward to the Olympic and Paralympic Games that will be held next summer, exactly 100 years after the Olympic Games took place in 1920 in Antwerp, Belgium, which could further em-

phasize our strong relationship in the field of sports. Belgium is working closely together with the host cities Mito and Hitachinaka in Ibaraki Prefecture, where the Belgian athletes will be training ahead of their respective disciplines at the Games. We are also planning to establish a Belgium House to bring together all ath-

letes, sponsors, delegates and friends of Belgium under one single roof in order to celebrate our strong bonds and friendship, as well as — hopefully — a lot of Olympic medals.

As for the future, our wish is to further enrich our relations in the economic, trade, cultural, academic, political, security and many other fields

and to take every opportunity offered by the economic and strategic partnership agreements concluded with the EU. This is why I am so passionate about my job here as the ambassador of Belgium to Japan. I am truly committed to work on ensuring that these bonds flourish even further, like the beautiful sakura blossoms in spring.



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Belgian Ambassador to Japan Roxane de Bilderling, ninth from left, toasts on the occasion of the celebration of the 10th anniversary of the Belgian Beer Weekend Japan in Roppongi, Tokyo, in September.

Congratulations on the Belgian King's Day



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