

Belgian King's Day

Publicity

Belgium-Japan partnerships broadening

By Roxane de Bilderling
Ambassador of Belgium

It is the time of the year again when we admire the beautiful and vivid autumn colors, prepare to celebrate the Belgian King's Day, and reflect upon our presence here in Japan and the strong links between Belgium and Japan across a multitude of areas.



Roxane de Bilderling

Before that, I would like to warmly congratulate Japan on the successful completion of the Olympic and Paralympic Games, which were held here in Tokyo last summer. I am proud to say that Belgium sent strong delegations to both events and came back with a record number of medals. While it was undoubtedly very regrettable that there was no audience to cheer on the amazing athletic performances and enjoy the splendid infrastructure that had been put in place, I still believe most if not all athletes were grateful to finally be able to compete after five long years of preparations. When I had the opportunity to meet some of the athletes, in particular the ones participating in the Paralympic Games, I was impressed and humbled by their personal stories of resilience, courage and determination.

This brings me to the pandemic and cooperation in the fight against the novel coronavirus. I am very proud to be able to say that this is an area where cooperation between Japan and Belgium is particularly visible and effective. You may be surprised to find out that that many of the COVID vaccines that are being used in Japan are actually produced in Belgium, and most of the other vaccines come from the rest of the European Union. The European Union exported more than half of its production of vaccines to the rest of the world, and one third of all those exported vaccine doses went to Japan (about 250 million doses out of 750 million doses exported!), which places Japan as the biggest beneficiary of this important life-saving production! Together, our countries are also greatly contributing to the international efforts to share vaccines with the rest of the world, through the COVAX support mechanism. "A friend in need is a friend indeed." This is so true for our friendship with Japan, as the numbers are

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Belgian King Philippe and Queen Mathilde with their four children

increasingly proving every day.

The pharmaceutical and health sector in general is one of the key areas of cooperation between Belgium and Japan. I recently visited BioJapan, an exhibition on biotechnology, and could see that, on top of the very strong investments of Japanese companies in Belgium and vice-versa, more top biotech companies from Belgium are showcasing their innovations and seeking additional partnerships in Japan. With October cancer awareness month behind us, let me highlight that in this field too, Belgian companies have brought top innovative technologies for the treatment of cancer, such as a large but extremely precise proton-therapy machine that I had the chance to view in Sapporo a few months ago. Cooperation in research is also very strong. Only a few days ago, an international collaborative team from the University of Ghent in Belgium and the National Cancer Center Japan made an interesting discovery that will help understand the structure of receptors involved in various cancers and other diseases, an important step toward new therapeutic approaches!

Regarding the recently held International Conference of the Parties to the Climate Change Convention, I would like to highlight

a few of the many aspects of cooperation between Belgium and Japan in the field of renewable energy production. As Belgium is further developing its offshore wind capacity (already ranked fourth in the world in this area, despite the country's modest size!), several of these investments are supported by Japanese companies. On the other hand, some Belgian companies have launched joint ventures with Japanese ones to develop this technology here in Japan. Even if the waters around Japan are often very deep, there are ways to overcome those challenges and install efficient wind mills both on and offshore. Belgium hosts two of the top three dredging companies in the world and their expertise in this field will greatly contribute to making this possible.

Another track is the development of hydrogen powered transport. The very first passenger ship running on hydrogen was recently inaugurated by a joint Japan-Belgium venture and more projects around tug boats and other types are being developed, while new projects on the production of hydrogen have also begun.

Finally, on biogas, a Belgian company in association with a French company has started implementing biogas solutions in breeding farms. Another young Belgian company has been installing smart sensors

on high voltage lines here in Japan, in order to improve electricity transport monitoring and to improve efficiency, and to avoid accidents and waste. It is inspiring to see our countries' companies working together to come up with solutions on the issue of climate change.

To highlight these strong economic links, but most of all to explore many more potential partnerships, HRH Princess Astrid, sister of HM King Philippe, will lead an economic mission to Japan in November 2022. The deep and long-lasting relations between the Imperial and Royal families are the heart of the Japan-Belgium interpersonal relations, which exist at various levels and in different aspects of everyday life. Many associations, societies

and groups promote these links and we are very fortunate to be able to count on their support.

In the academic world, Belgium has continued to welcome Japanese students who wished to study in Belgium despite the pandemic crisis. We do indeed hope that the Belgian students and researchers who have research programs and exchanges planned in Japan will also be allowed to enter the country. I have visited several universities that have links with Belgium and the same sentiment was voiced there as well. More generally, efforts are being made for the mutual recognition of vaccination certificates and we hope that this will lead to the re-opening of the important people-to-people exchanges between our two

countries.

Another important dimension in our relations with Japan is the rich and diverse cultural exchanges that are taking place, be it in visual arts or music. I have attended several concerts of musicians who either studied in Belgium or participated in the famous Queen Elisabeth Musical Contest, which is held in Brussels every year. Japanese musicians very often find their way among the top finalists of this very prestigious concert!

It is heartwarming and so motivating to list these active and enriching ties that exist between Belgium and Japan, and I am very much looking forward to continuing the promotion and the strengthening of our ties even further.

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The Belgian delegation marches during the opening ceremony of the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games.Congratulations
on the Belgian King's Day

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