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Chamber of Commerce
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Belgians in Japan

6

10

THE BELGIAN
EXPAT REGIME

12

THE EUROPEAN
GREEN DEAL
INDUSTRIAL PLAN

18

INTEGRATION
IN BELGIUM

20

KAMISHIBAI

EDITORIAL

By HE Antoine Evrard, Belgian Ambassador,
Embassy of the Kingdom of Belgium in Japan

Since my arrival in Tokyo in September 2023, I have been witnessing the quality and variety of the bonds between Belgium and Japan. Whether in trade, culture, education, sciences, or sports, Japanese and Belgians have built and maintained a solid friendship based on mutual trust. I realize how lucky I am as an Ambassador to benefit from decades of cooperation between our governments, our regions, our universities, our private sector and our citizens.

Unfortunately, 2024 started in sorrow and grief, as a huge earthquake with devastating consequences hit central Japan on New Year's Day. Belgium presented its condolences to the families of the victims, and to the communities affected by this catastrophe. This was a painful reminder of the 2011 events of Fukushima, where I paid my first visit outside Tokyo upon my arrival in Japan in September 2023. Visiting the Great East Japan Earthquake and Nuclear Disaster Memorial Museum and the surrounding areas was a journey full of emotions, but also filled with admiration of Japan's resilience in the face of these terrible circumstances.

Cooperation and mutual understanding are the key to our relationship. As responsible and engaged members of the international community, Belgium and Japan have converging views when it comes to facing today's challenges such as security, prosperity, or climate change. We both strongly advocate a rule based international order and respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law. As chair of the G7 for Japan or as Presidency of the Council of the European Union for Belgium,

for example, our countries show their willingness to be active members of the international community. We are strong supporters of multilateralism in words and deeds.

Our economic relations in 2023 were solid and the prospects for 2024 are promising. Building on the successful economic mission presided by HRH Princess Astrid, as representative of HM King Philippe, in December 2022, our bilateral trade has been robust. 2022 was a record year for Belgian trade with Japan thanks to the export of Covid vaccines. 2023 saw a return to more normal levels, but our exports to Japan are still higher than pre-Covid years. Japan remains a privileged trade and investment partner, and we saw several important new Japanese investments in our country in recent years. In the opposite direction, numerous Belgian companies have opened offices in Japan. Focus sectors for Belgian-Japanese cooperation in 2024 will remain biopharma, the digital transition and renewable energy.

In this regard and following up on the COP 28 and the commitments made by both our governments to tackle climate change, I had the opportunity to meet in Tokyo, Osaka, Hokkaido, or Ibaraki prefecture with Belgian and Japanese actors active in the green transition, with a particular interest for hydrogen and wind energy. One cannot stress enough the need for cooperation in these fields, and for uniting our forces in order to reach a decarbonized economy.

In Japan, our preparations for the World Expo of Osaka 2025 are going full



HE Antoine Evrard

speed. On January 16th, our Commissioner General for the Expo, His Excellency Mr Pieter De Crem, presided over the groundbreaking ceremony of the Belgian pavilion, that will be located in the "Saving Lives" district. We are looking forward to our participation to this landmark event, and to showcase the current state of industrial and scientific progress in Belgium, as well as the many cooperations that exist between our two countries in this field.

The continued interest for Japan in Belgium among the younger generations is paving the way for the future. The Embassy had the pleasure of hosting a welcome event for Belgian students in Japan, organised together with the BLCCJ Starters, to guide and accompany them in their Japanese experience. It was a pleasure to see the eagerness of our students coming from all over Belgium to get acquainted with Japan, its language, its traditions, and its culture. Studying abroad is a fantastic experience and a huge asset in one's professional life. Our universities and academic institutions are extending their cooperation in order to exchange more students and professors, in a wide range of fields. They will be the makers of tomorrow's Belgian-Japanese relations in diplomacy, business or education and bring forward this friendship that we cherish.

IN THIS ISSUE

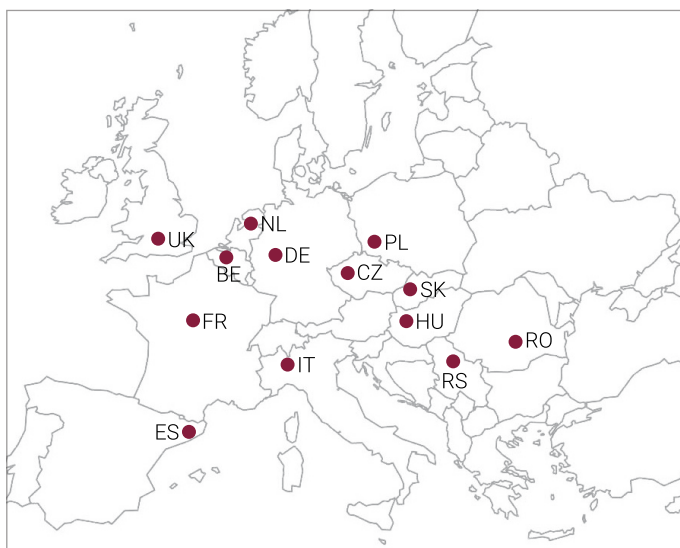
- | | | | |
|----|---------------------------------------|----|---|
| 2 | Editorial | 12 | The European Green Deal Industrial Plan |
| 4 | A Discovery of Japanese Swordsmanship | 16 | BJA New Year Cocktail Celebration |
| 6 | Interview with Joris Vermeulen | 18 | Integration in Belgium |
| 9 | BJA Exclusive Workshop | 20 | Kamishibai |
| 10 | The Belgian Expat Regime | 23 | Personalia |



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A Discovery of Japanese Swordsmanship 「居合」 - 日本の伝統武芸

Sunday, 19 November 2023 – Rōgetsudō Dojo, Brussels



Koh Ichi Masaki, Head of European Affairs of JMA and BJA Cultural Committee Chair, introducing Professor Andreas Thele, Faculty of Philosophy and Letters at University of Liège.



Benoît de Spoelberch, teacher of Musō Jikiden Eishin-ryū Iaijutsu, demonstrating the art of Iai with one of his students.



Tanguy Van Overstraeten, Partner Linklaters LLP and BJA Vice-President, wielding Benoît de Spoelberch's sword.

The BJA and Rōgetsudō Dojo welcomed over 60 participants to discover the art of Japanese swordsmanship in their beautiful dojo in Brussels. Iai is a Martial Art which developed in Japan from the beginning of the 17th century onwards. It consists of sword techniques practiced with live blades in the form of Kata.

After some welcome words by Koh Ichi Masaki, Head of European Affairs of JMA and BJA Cultural Committee Chair, Professor Andreas Thele, Faculty of Philosophy and Letters at University of Liège, lectured about the spiritual, historical, and

cultural background specific to the Japanese Martial Arts. Techniques were demonstrated and explained by Benoît de Spoelberch, teacher of Musō Jikiden Eishin-ryū Iaijutsu, together with his students. The impressive display of sword-wielding and swift movements dazzled the audience.

This event was an opportunity to discover a little-known aspect of Japanese culture and its relevance within today's society and ended with an exquisite gathering of all with sake and Japanese delicacies.



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BELGIANS IN JAPAN JORIS VERMEULEN

By Dirk De haene, Managing Partner of OSKAR D,
and BJA Editorial Committee Member



Q: It is already a long tradition of Konishi to always have a Belgian on site for the import of Belgian specialty beers. I, myself have known quite a few people with whom it was always pleasant to work with together, such as Philip, Bert, Jan, Hans, Carl ... How long have you been working at Konishi? And what did you do before that (studies - work)?

A: Like most of predecessors and colleagues that came later, I graduated in Japanese Studies at Leuven University (KU Leuven). Initially I wasn't planning to live and work in Japan, but after studying abroad at Shinshu University I pretty much made up my mind to return to the land of the rising sun. Before that happened, I worked briefly in a toy store and even more briefly with a big Japanese insurance company in Brussels.

But when the opportunity arose though, I was lucky enough to be selected for Konishi, and so began my life in Japan. That's already 12 and a half years ago!

Q: What does a typical working day at Konishi look like for you?

A: One of the fun things to be working for Konishi is that the job is quite versatile.

A day at the office starts at 8:30 in the morning with a very traditional "morning greet" (朝礼) where employees take turns in standing in front of everybody and recite the company slogan, followed

by a short message (that can be about work or private life or pretty much anything). After that, work lasts until 17:30 with a fixed lunch break between 12 and 1. In principle it's desk work, but there are many days that I'm not at the office.

Preparing and participating in beer-related events is a big part of what I do, but there are also different things like translating during a sake brewery tour or having presentations to introduce Belgian beer to clients.

Q: Have you seen things change over the years?

A: Very much. When I started, I dare say Konishi was still a very traditional company. Both outwardly (shaving every day, wearing a suit every day, ...) as internally (much more flexibility in the way of working).

It stays of course a Japanese company that is around since 1550, so things will not change overnight, but I think we are finding a good balance between traditional and progressive.

Q: Do colleagues still often have drinks after work?

A: I can see why people should think that, but it's a lot less than you might imagine. As employees of a sake brewer, we are very aware of the bad impression we would make if we would drink



Konishi catalogue 2024

too much and cause some kind of disturbance, whether it is a minor issue like being too loud or a major issue like drunk driving (which includes riding a bicycle). So, drinking in group is quite rare, but that of course doesn't mean that two or three of us don't have a quiet drink after work.

Q: You are also closely involved in the Belgian Beer Weekends, organized by Trainspot (founded by an ex Konishi employee). Those festivals have been going on for several years, meanwhile at multiple locations. Where and when will they take place in 2024? Any idea which Belgian artists will be performing? Does this also mean extra workload for you guys?

A: This year is already the 14th year that the Belgian Beer Weekends will be organized and it has become a big part of what we do. It's a great opportunity to introduce Belgian beer to Japanese people (after all, Belgian beer will always be a niche-product) and to interact directly with consumers.

I can't yet divulge any specifics as long as the official announcement hasn't been made, but it's safe to say that you can already block your agenda during the golden week. Barring accidents, we will return to all of last year's venues and maybe there will be a surprise. (editor's note: meanwhile the sched-

ule for the BBW is announced, see text frame on this page)

Q: To continue about beer for a moment... In Belgium you see more and more interest in non-alcoholic beers. Assortment is steadily expanding and quality getting better. Are you noticing that in Japan as well?

A: The trend towards non-alcoholic and low-alcohol beers in Japan has been going on for a longer time than in Belgium. However, it's a segment that is on one side dominated by the big breweries (Asahi, Kirin, Suntory, Sapporo) and on the other hand focuses on more or less one beer style: pilsner. It doesn't really make sense to import non-alcoholic Belgian pilsners and make them compete with the qualitatively high but super cheap Japanese brands.

Additionally, getting non-alcoholic beer through custom and health control in Japan is a gargantuan task, scaring many interested parties away.

There are a few exceptions though which prove the rule, but it's a niche market within a niche market.

Q: Do you live far from work? Alone, or?

A: Both office and brewery are located in Itami, Hyogo Prefecture, near Osaka. I used to live within a 10-minute bicycle

ride range, but around 5 years ago I moved together with my Japanese wife to her hometown Osaka. It's still only a 20-minute train ride away, and if you know the Japanese train system, you know that it's a breeze. I also take the other direction than most commuters, so I don't have to ride any trains that are packed like sardines – lucky me.

Q: Besides your job, I see you are very active in your free time exploring the country (lingerintheeast.blogspot.com). How do you tackle that? Any particular themes? Do you venture out solo, or?

A: I'm not that much of an international traveler, but I do love roaming around Japan. It's easy and very rewarding I find. I started out with pretty much the basic tourist attractions, but now I am way more focused on nature and hiking. That doesn't mean I don't visit any museums or cities, but the hiking thing really charges my batteries and I just love the nature here.

After visiting around half of Japan's 47 prefectures I made it a goal to visit them all. I achieved that in 2021 by visiting Iwate Prefecture.

Since then, I try to change focus a little bit more on smaller islands, but I also have a few other ways of deciding where to go. Does a friend fancy a particular hike somewhere? Where does my favorite soccer team play next?

Belgian Beer Weekend

- › Toyosu: 05/04 » 07/04 and 12/04 » 14/04
- › Fukuoka: 17/04 » 21/04
- › Nagoya: 25/04 » 06/05
- › Yokohama: 16/05 » 19/05
- › Osaka: 22/05 » 26/05
- › Roppongi: 12/09 » 16/09
- › Shinjuku: December

More info: <https://belgianbeerweekend.jp>



Kyoto



Kawanishi



Akan (Akanko)



Akan



Toyonaka



Chiba



Fukuchiyama



Ibaraki



Itami



Izumi



Kawanishi



Mino



Nara



Osaka



Osaka



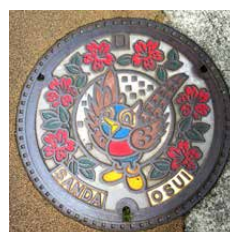
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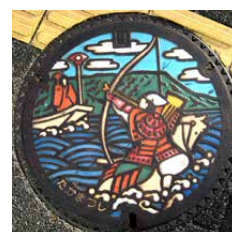
Sakaiminato



Sakaiminato



Sanda



Takamatsu

Q: Meanwhile, you also have a very extensive collection of photographs of “manhole covers,” a typical Japanese phenomenon. How did that come about? Do you have plans with those photos?

A: I had visited Japan already a few times and I studied there, but it was only during my first trip to Hokkaido with my host family that I noticed these manhole covers as they are called. We were in Akan and I thought they were beautiful, true pieces of art. Since then, I looked them up everywhere I went. Since a few years, the cover designs have gathered much interest in Japan too, which made many cities and municipalities to issue new designs with cutesy characters (like many pokémon designs), but I find this is a bit sad. I prefer the old designs that depict things that are inherent to the place where they are used.

For example the ones in Akan feature a Japanese crane and marimo with the Akan Lake in the background – all specific to that area of Hokkaido. Osaka castle is used for the Osaka cover designs, etc...

I keep on searching the manhole covers out, but I have absolutely no plans to do anything with the pictures I take.

Q: Thanks a lot for your time and for sharing your experience, Joris. One last question: how about your future?

A: Uhm, I may be accused of a lack of ambition, but I feel in place here. I am happy at work and privately. I try to do what I do as well as I can.

Never say never, because there are so many factors over which you have no control, but if you ask me now, I have no intention of returning to Belgium.

KONISHI

About Konishi Brewing

Konishi Brewing Co., Ltd. was founded in 1550 in Itami, Hyogo Prefecture, located between Osaka and Kobe. During its 470-year history, the main business of the company is and has been the brewing of sake (traditional rice wine). Konishi Brewing Co., Ltd. is the oldest family-run sake brewery that can trace its lineage straight back to the foundation of the company, with current president Shinuemon Konishi being the 15th generation.

BJA Exclusive Workshop - Synergizing cross-cultural business communication

BJA 特別ワークショップ - 相乗効果を生む異文化間ビジネス・コミュニケーション

Tuesday, 12 December 2023 – Steigenberger Wiltcher's Hotel, Brussels



Kiyoshi Iwai, Japan Affairs Director of JTI shares a few notable differences between Japanese and Belgians' daily business manners.



Olivier van Beneden, General Manager of Japan Consulting Office, explaining the objectives of the workshop.



Junko Kanno, Senior Manager, Japan Global Practice Group – Europe, WTW Willis Towers Watson, delivers her insights on working in a multicultural workplace from her own experience.

Thanks to the warm support by All Nippon Airways, the BJA Membership Committee was thrilled to welcome over 35 participants to an exclusive cross-cultural business communication workshop at the elegant Steigenberger Wiltcher's Hotel in Brussels.



Philippe Borremans, BJA Membership Committee Chair warmly welcomes the audience to the BJA exclusive workshop.

The event was opened by Mr Philippe Borremans, BJA Membership Committee Chair, followed by interesting and insightful

testimonials by Mr Kiyoshi Iwai, Japan Affairs Director of JTI and Mrs Junko Kanno, Senior Manager, Japan Global Practice Group – Europe of WTW Willis Towers Watson.

Subsequently Mr Olivier van Beneden, General Manager of Japan Consulting Office, took the lead and explained the objectives of the workshop: to increase mutual understanding of other business cultures, to identify challenges and discuss about possible solutions, and to provide efficient communication tools to work better together. He divided the participants into 4 groups for practical sessions including a pleasant coffee break.

All participants enthusiastically engaged and appreciated this highly interactive workshop which brought ample opportunities to network, share experiences, exchange opinions, and gain understanding. Celebrating our cultures by embracing our differences and respecting each other - what a perfect way to end the BJA 60th anniversary year.

ANA
Inspiration of JAPAN



THE BELGIAN EXPAT REGIME

By Filip Van Praet, Director at Vialto Partners, Lowie Plasschaert, Manager at Vialto Partners and Evelien Venken, Associate at Vialto Partners

As of 1 January 2022, a new special tax regime for expats (inbound taxpayers and researchers) was introduced in Belgium. This regime, which is embedded in the Belgian Income Tax Code, serves the same purpose as the old expat regime (for foreign executives, specialists, and researchers) it replaces, notably to attract qualified staff to Belgium from abroad, fostering companies to maintain and ideally strengthen their competitiveness, both nationally and internationally. It is applicable to all new qualifying employment situations as from 1 January 2022. Consequently, during the past two years (2022 and 2023) this new beneficial regime could already be applied if certain conditions were met and if a timely request was filed, subject to the approval of the Belgian tax authorities. Moreover, individuals benefiting from the old regime who were less than 5 years in Belgium on 1 January 2022 (and who met the conditions for the new regime) could opt-in for the new expat regime, by 30 September 2022 at the latest.

While the impact of the new legislation is admittedly “broader” in application, in the contribution below we focus specifically on Japanese employees working / coming to work in Belgium.

The end of the old Expat Tax Regime

For those expats who on 1 January 2022, were employed under the old regime, but who were not eligible for the new regime (not meeting the conditions) or who (could but) did not (want to) opt-in, a two-year phase out period has been foreseen during which they could further benefit from the old expat status. This two-year transition period came to

an end on 31 December 2023. As of 1 January 2024, only one expat tax regime remains available in Belgium. Indeed, after 40 years, the old expat tax regime (which was based on a practice note issued in 1983) and its related benefits ceased to exist and can thus no longer be applied. Depending on the personal situation, employment setup and wealth of the individual taxpayer, this may have unexpected consequences for certain Japanese expats living in Belgium.

The end of the special tax regime for foreign executives, specialists and researchers also means the end of the tax benefits associated with this old regime in Belgium. As of 1 January 2024, the following benefits no longer apply:

- › **Deemed non-residency status** meaning that the expat (although often living in Belgium with the close family members) was only taxable on Belgian source professional and private income.
- › **Foreign travel exclusion**, referring to the part of the salary that related to qualifying foreign business trips and was exempted from taxation in Belgium, following a specific counting method.
- › **Costs proper to the employer**, limited to €11.250 or €29.750 (per taxable period) exempted from Belgian income tax and social security contributions. These costs were calculated based on a “technical note” issued by the Belgian tax authorities. Alternatively, these could be based on a “company policy”. These were intended as a compensation for the cost differential between Belgium (host country) and the country of ori-

gin. Such expense allowances could encompass a cost-of-living allowance (COLA), a cost of housing allowance (COHA) and tax equalization component (TE).

Trailing income

The full stop of the old expat regime per 31 December 2023 will also have an impact on trailing income such as bonuses, equity based compensation (stock options, RSUs etc.) or Belgian income taxes that will be paid by the employer upon future assessment. If the taxable moment arises after 31 December 2023, it will no longer be possible to apply any of the tax benefits related to the old special tax regime.

Tax Residency in Belgium

Under the old regime, Japanese expats were deemed non-resident taxpayers of Belgium for income tax purposes. In principle, they could not become tax residents of Belgium. This sometimes resulted in a peculiar situation of tax statelessness, whereby a portion of the expatriate’s professional income (linked to the foreign business trips) was taxed nowhere. However, as from 1 January 2024, in principle, the normal Belgian tax residency rule are applicable.

- › As a result, most of the Japanese expats (with or without new expat regime) will be considered tax residents in Belgium, taxable on their worldwide income in Belgium regardless of the source (unless they can demonstrate actual, justified, and continued tax residency abroad).
- › Belgian tax residency also means that they will be entitled to invoke the double tax treaties concluded



by Belgium and other countries involved (for example: Japan), to mitigate international double taxation.

Considering that specific rules apply to declare foreign income and knowing that a Belgian cadastral value should be requested and allocated to foreign properties (for example: real estate located in Japan), the Belgian annual income tax return can become rather complex.

Moreover, Belgian tax residency may also trigger liability to other taxes in Belgium, such as the “tax on stock exchange transactions” and the “tax on securities accounts”. The reporting of the specific taxable basis and the payment of the corresponding taxes are typically operated outside of the normal annual Belgian resident income tax return and may give rise to further administrative formalities in the hands of the expats. Moreover, for tax residents of Belgium there are additional reporting obligations, such as the reporting of foreign accounts to the Central Contact Point within the National Bank of Belgium.

The end of the transition period of the ‘old special tax regime’ may thus result in an increase of the Belgian tax burden for certain individuals, and trigger additional obligations and complexities linked to the Belgian tax residency as of income year 2024.

The new Belgian expat regime in a nutshell

The new special tax regime (which was introduced in January 2022) concerns two regimes: the Regime for Incoming Taxpayers (BBIB) and Regime for Incom-

ing Researchers (BBIO). Both systems are identical in terms of duration, procedural aspects, and benefits but there are differences in conditions of application. The following conditions must be met:

- › For the new tax regime to apply, inbound taxpayers (employees or company directors) as well as inbound researchers (only employees) should be recruited directly abroad, or they should be seconded/transferred by a foreign enterprise, which belongs to a multinational group, to an enterprise or establishment in Belgium.
- › During a period of 60 months prior to the start of the employment in Belgium, the incoming taxpayers and researchers may:
 - not have been a tax residents of Belgium;
 - not have been subject to Belgian non-resident income tax in terms of their professional income;
 - not have been living within 150 kilometers from the Belgian border.
- › For incoming taxpayers, the gross remuneration must exceed a minimum threshold of €75.000 per calendar year (to prorated in the year of arrival, departure, or end of employment).
- › For incoming researchers, there is no minimum gross salary requirement. However, they must hold the appropriate degree (PhD or master in specific fields of study) or be able to demonstrate relevant professional experience of at least 10 years. Moreover, they must carry out exclusively (100%) or mainly (80%) research activities of a scientific, fundamental, industrial, or technical nature within a laboratory or company conducting

one or more research and development (R&D) programs.

Benefits

The BBIB and BBIO essentially grant the same benefits and are revolving around “costs proper to the employer”, amounts which can be paid free of Belgian income tax and social security contributions. Unlike the old special tax regime, the cost proper to the employer are now calculated on a flat-rate basis, limited to 30% of the gross salary and with an absolute cost ceiling of €90.000 per year. These costs must be paid “on top of” the gross remuneration (whereas under the old regime the costs proper to the employer were calculated differently and often processed as included in the gross remuneration).

In addition (and beyond the 30% limit for recurring expenses and the absolute cost ceiling of €90.000 per year applicable to them), the employer can also consider other expenses arising from the employment of the incoming taxpayer or researcher in Belgium. These are typically (and within certain limits) moving expenses to Belgium, furnishing costs of the residence in Belgium and school fees (of an international or a private school in Belgium) for the children who move with the taxpayer to Belgium.

Nominative lists abolished

As stated in original text of law, by 31 January of every calendar year employers were required to provide a nominative list of all employees and company directors who benefitted from the special tax regime during the previous year. The purpose of this obligation was to allow verification of (compliance) with the minimum salary requirement (€75.000 threshold applicable to inbound taxpayers on an annual basis). However, as from income year 2023 the obligation to draw up a nominative list will be lifted and replaced by additional information on the tax forms 281.10 (employees) 281.20 (company directors), allowing the Belgian tax authorities to do the necessary verifications.

THE EUROPEAN GREEN DEAL INDUSTRIAL PLAN

The long road ahead towards Europe becoming the continent of clean technologies

By Dr Fabrice Stassin, Director Government Affairs Electromobility Projects & Coordinator for Asian Affairs at Umicore, and BJA EU Committee Chair & BJA IPT Co-Chair

*To be or not to be
... the continent
of clean technologies*

*That is the question
... that European
policymakers should
ask themselves*

Last year at Davos, EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen promised a massive flow of European cash for the clean technologies that are needed to tackle climate change. According to the EU chief, Europe would become soon the home of clean technologies.

At Davos 2024 edition, politics, fiscal austerity, and military anxieties have had their toll and Ursula von der Leyen returned empty-handed. A lot has clearly changed in a year and Europe now seems to many analysts ready to let the US and China go ahead and lead in the clean tech race.

What has not changed though is that the industrialization and adoption of clean technologies in Europe is faced with many challenges that need the attention and care of European policymakers and politicians.

In this article, we highlight the challenges ahead of us in Europe from the perspective of the industry of the advanced materials used in the rechargeable lithium-ion batteries empower-

ing among others the electric vehicles (EVs) that are needed for the EU's Green Deal.

As a side note, we believe that the challenges and solutions described herein can easily be extrapolated to other kinds of advanced materials as well as to the clean technologies using these advanced materials.

Industrialization and adoption of clean technologies in Europe is faced with scope, scale, speed, and sustainability challenges that need tackling.

The first challenge is SCOPE, i.e., the need for the value chain to develop in a pretty “synchronous” way in a local-for-local approach. This is quite complex for different value chain steps having different capex intensities, lead times, supply constraints, and battery chemistry options. As an example, if capacities for the refining of lithium or the mining of nickel mining did not grow, the production of advanced materials for batteries could not follow and vice versa.

The second challenge is SCALE. In markets growing at double-digit speed, maintaining, and growing market share requires massive investments to benefit from economies of scale and keep up the pace while undergoing price pressure and competition from other operators (some not bound by the same sustainability rules and having received considerable financial help to grow, possibly leading to overcapacity). Industrial capacities need then to be supplied with a secured and cost-optimized flow of critical raw materials. Analysts often refer to an investment intensity of 1 billion euros for a production capacity (100 GWh) of the advanced materials enabling up to 1.5 million EVs (while there are about 90 million new cars built every year going forward). As a counter-reaction to the US's Inflation Reduction Act, Europe allowed a relaxation of State Aid rules which led some Member States (and some not) to provide generous support to support industry's ambitions in the face of Europe's target of an open strategic autonomy.

The third challenge is SPEED. Developing and growing industrial operations takes too much time in Europe and rather "bureaucratic" work – We can also add on top of that the regulatory uncertainty (e.g., EU's chemicals regulation, and a possible ban on fluorinated substances) and the difficulty of finding talent to work in the operations. As an example, while in some parts of the world, it is possible to carry out an environmental impact assessment and a permitting process mostly in a parallel fashion, it remains a challenge in Europe with on top of that a risk of appeal. As a rule of thumb, getting green lights can take up to twice as long in Europe compared to the rest of the world. The speed (and cost) to innovate is also a concern since the market expects the industry to deliver on its innovation roadmap towards improved, cost-competitive, and more sustainable clean technologies. This requires the indus-

try to invest considerable financial amounts into product and process innovation, sometimes with the support of public authorities, for instance at the European level through the battery partnership (also known as Batt4EU - More at www.bepa.eu).

The fourth challenge is SUSTAINABILITY (and ethical practices). Many companies in advanced materials want to go carbon neutral in a reasonable timeline. This is pressure to decarbonize which companies put on themselves, but which also comes from customers and the regulators. Fair enough but we need access to an abundant, safe, cheap, and clean supply of energy (be it renewable or nuclear). We also need to be able to source ethically the critical raw materials that end up in the advanced materials. Moreover, in the case of batteries, the EU's regulation now mandates among others recycled content obligations. Last but not least, the industry must implement digital passports which will enable tracing & tracking. All these requirements are coming at a cost, not easy to carry over down the value chain and not necessarily being a source of competitiveness in the absence of support measures. To stay strong on driving the sustainability & circularity agenda, our industry needs constant support to protect the EU-based strategic value chains.

Ongoing and future policy initiatives should offer support in realizing the EU's ambitions on clean technologies.

On SCOPE

- › Industrial policy signals such as targets in the CRMA (critical raw materials act) and NZIA (net zero industry act) do help coordinate the investments and collaborations along the value chain but further granularity in the targets is clearly needed
- › Industry and other stakeholders active in advanced materials would benefit from the EU setting up a governance mechanism similar to the

already-existing European Alliances

- › Trade policy signals must also be consistent with the encouragement to grow strategic value chains in Europe, e.g., through local content requirements and tariffs/border adjustment mechanisms able based on ESG (environment, social and governance) criteria to address potential issues of unfair competition
- › Developments in environmental policy should not put at risk the already-made investments or delay future investments by creating "chemistry uncertainty" such as is the case with chemicals containing fluorine

On SCALE

- › Access to capital must be improved through grants or mixed financing options, ideally provided at the EU level through the Innovation Fund, the European Investment Bank, ...
- › This is key to turning the profit equation and unlocking industrial investments which would not happen at the same speed otherwise
- › We see a potential disturbance of the single market should TCTF (temporary crisis and transition framework) not be followed at some point by a (complimentary) ambitious European Fund for Strategic Technologies
- › On the security of supply, the targets set by the CRMA are a good way forward while we build the necessary supply bilateral partnerships with like-minded countries

On SPEED

- › Member States must be flexible in reviewing their permitting processes and their administrations
- › Agencies in charge of environmental impact assessment and permitting must be staffed appropriately
- › Key strategic projects must receive preferential treatment and adapted scrutiny
- › Judiciary risk must be contained
- › Europe must harness the power of digitalization, modeling, and artificial intelligence to accelerate the

pace of advanced materials discovery and reduce their cost of development

On SUSTAINABILITY

- › The penetration of renewable electricity has to accelerate
- › The cost of renewable electricity for industrial operators in strategic sectors must come down
- › Innovation support (by the European Commission, the Member States

and the Regions) towards higher performance, more cost-competitive, and more sustainable clean technologies must be more ambitious and available for years ahead to ensure “innovation continuity” while bridging from the lab to the market

- › To feed the build-up of recycling capacities and embrace a circular economy, we must maximize the recycling of production scrap and end-

of-life waste in Europe

As a conclusion, numerous challenges remain in front of all players as well as policymakers. More collaboration, ambitious and swift actions are needed to be able to move fast and well to deliver on the decarbonization of energy, mobility and industry systems while creating economic value for industry and European citizens ... 2024 must be the year of action!

BELGIUM HOUSE IN DAVOS

The BJA and Mrs. Oto-Kellens, BJA Executive Director, had the honor of being invited by JTI, BJA company member, to partake in the prestigious inaugural opening of the Belgium House during the 2024 World Economic Forum in Davos.

The Belgium House served as a convergence point for Belgium's leading industries, including biopharma, renewable energy, and international logistics, creating a significant platform for collective discussion and focus. Opportunities to engage in discussions on innovative solutions relevant to various industries were numerous. Networking moments with notable Belgian stakeholders made the experience truly memorable, meeting inspiring individuals, visionary speakers, key business stakeholders, and prestigious guests.

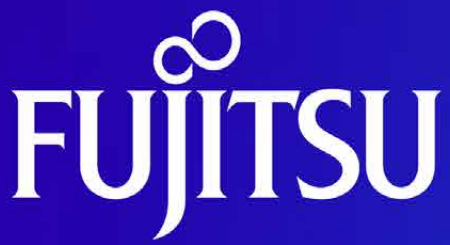
The discussions delved into crucial topics such as safeguarding Europe's main industrial and logistics hubs, the building blocks

of the global energy system, and clean tech innovation on the road to achieving net-zero emissions. Additionally, there were ample opportunities to exchange insights and elaborate on the importance of Belgium-Japan relations with a diverse array of attendees and speakers.

The range of opportunities extended from informal and formal dinners, to business luncheons, conference presentations, and cocktails. The Belgium House welcomed His and Her Majesties the King and Queen of Belgium, HE Prime Minister De Croo, and special guests such as Mr Bill Gates and many more. The stay ended with a high-level dinner meeting with the Belgian business community.

For those interested in a more comprehensive look at the events, including videos, photos, speakers, and insights, please visit the following link: [Belgium House at WEF Davos](#).





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BJA REPORT

BJA New Year Cocktail Celebration BJA 新年カクテルパーティー

Monday, 22 January 2024 – Van der Valk Hotel Brussels Airport, Diegem



(Left to right) H.E. Ambassador Kazutoshi Aikawa, Mission of Japan to the EU, Mr Allan Peiper, Cycling Coach, Prof Gilbert Declerck, Member of the Board of imec International and BJA President, H.E. Ambassador Masahiro Mikami, Embassy of Japan, and Mr Michael Verveckken, Managing Director of Fujitsu, are toasting for a prosperous New Year.



Mr Michael Verveckken, Managing Director of Fujitsu Belgium, the hosting company of the evening, is delighted to welcome so many esteemed guests gathered to celebrate the start of the New Year together.

Thanks to the generous sponsorship by Fujitsu Belgium, the BJA cordially invited the members to join the New Year Cocktail Reception to celebrate together the year of the Dragon.

sador to Belgium and His Excellency Kazutoshi Aikawa, Japanese Ambassador to the EU as honorable guests, and Mr Allan Peiper, Cycling coach as a special guest motivating us all to take the year to new heights.



After the motivational words of Mr Peiper, welcome words by Professor Gilbert Declerck, Member of the Board imec International and BJA President followed. His Excellency Ambassador Mikami delivered his New Year greetings and Mr Verveckken, Managing Director of Fujitsu Belgium gave a short presentation. Following their speeches, they were joined by HE Ambassador Aikawa for the “Kagamiwari”, the traditional sake barrel breaking.

On this occasion, over 150 guests gathered together with His Excellency Mr and Mrs Masahiro Mikami, Japanese Amba-

While enjoying this precious moment together savoring delicious sushi, canapés, and sake, the evening certainly was an enchanting way to start celebrating an auspicious year.





The special guest of the evening, Mr Allan Peiper, Cycling Coach, is giving his inspiring story to the audience.



Professor Gilbert Declerck, Member of the Board of imec International and BJA President is thrilled to open the New Year Celebration night.



H.E. Ambassador Masahiro Mikami, Japanese Ambassador to Belgium and NATO is kindly extending his New Year greetings.



INTEGRATION IN BELGIUM

LEGAL AND PRACTICAL ASPECTS

By Rimma Abadjan, Manager at Deloitte and BJA Editorial Committee Member and Matthias Lommers, Partner at Deloitte and BJA Legal & Tax Committee Member

You might have heard about the integration courses which are available for foreigners, and perhaps wondered what rules are applicable to you as a Japanese national arriving in Belgium on assignment. Am I required to follow an integration course in Belgium? Are my family members obliged to take an integration course? This article will provide you insights into the requirements and options when we discuss integration in the Belgian context.

Integration requirements for foreigners

Federal rules applying to foreign nationals moving to Belgium state that foreigners temporarily in Belgium these individuals should make efforts to integrate in Belgian society. These rules also state that a mechanism to control

these integration efforts should be in place. There are some exemptions to these rules for EU nationals and their family members, EU Blue Card applicants, individuals under international protection status and others. Moreover, employment in Belgium is often regarded as proof of integration and that applies in this context too. Upon renewal of the residence permits, working expats automatically fulfill this general requirement of integration and are not confronted with additional requests, while their family members are often asked by the town halls to provide proof of their integration efforts. The efforts to integrate in Belgian society can be demonstrated by any means, such as employment of the family members, education in a local school, language courses, voluntary activities, community involvement, club memberships etc. It is important to underline that lack of proof of integration efforts should not lead to refusal of a residence permit renewal application for the family members. However, the town halls are instructed to control the integration efforts and it is a normal request as part of the process.

Integration programme: different rules in different regions of Belgium

It is important to point out that in addition to the general (federal) rules to demonstrate integration efforts at the time of residence permit renewal, there are also specific regional rules related to integration programmes. These integration programmes are governed by

regional rules because they fall within the responsibility of the 3 regions in Belgium. As result, rules governing the integration programmes are different depending on the region where you live: Flanders, Brussels or Wallonia. That also means that an integration programme differs in content. Mostly, integration programmes aim to provide foreign nationals arriving in Belgium with an overview of general rules and customs governing different aspects of the Belgian society, including the state structures, educational and judicial systems, healthcare organisation, etc. Often, these programmes have a language course component allowing participants acquire basic knowledge of one of the national languages of Belgium. Generally, the integration courses provide interesting information to help participants to get to know Belgium and Belgian culture. We will investigate each region separately to provide some additional guidance on applicable rules.

Flanders

Flanders was the first region which introduced an integration programme in 2004. The integration programme has been amended multiple times since. In Flanders, it is not mandatory for expats and their family members due to the presumption that their presence in Belgium is only of a temporary nature. Therefore, in the Flemish region, Japanese expats and their family members can follow an integration programme if they wish, but are not required to do so.

The rule is based on the specific nature of stay and not the nationality of foreigners. It is expected that these Flemish rules on integration will change shortly, we will provide updates once the new rules are in place.

Brussels

The Brussels region introduced their integration programme only in 2022. Also in Brussels region, expats are exempt from the requirement to follow an integration programme. This exemption does not, however, apply to their family members.

In practice this means that family members of Japanese expats above age of 18 registering in the Brussels region will receive a notification from the town hall that they are required to enroll into an integration programme. Family members can be (temporarily) exempt if they

can present circumstances preventing them from following such an integration course, e.g. employment or education which cannot be combined with the course or if they are taking care of a child. The suspension of the obligation to take the integration course must be coordinated with the town hall. Failure to take the integration course can result in an administrative fines ranging from 100 to 2500 EUR. Payment of the fine does not exempt the foreign national from following the course.

Wallonia

In the Walloon region, expats are also exempt, and the family members are required to follow an integration course unless they can demonstrate that they are employed (at least for 3 months half-time). There are less temporary exemption options in the Walloon Region. Administrative fines up to 2500 €

can be imposed for failure to take the integration course. Payment of the fine does not exempt the foreign national from following the course.

Way forward

Whereas Japanese expats are exempt from integration requirements by virtue of their employment in Belgium, Japanese family members above age 18 are not. Both the Brussels and Walloon regions require the family members to follow an integration programme (unless specific exemptions apply).

Deloitte, together with BJA is looking into ways to convince the governments of these regions to extend the exemption to family members as well, based on the argument that most Japanese families only stay in Belgium for a few years and do not have the intention to stay permanently in our country.

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KAMISHIBAI

A STORY ABOUT JAPANESE STORYTELLING

By Geert Benoit, Managing Director, Yamagata Europe, and BJA Editorial Committee Member



On a cloudy day more than ten years ago, my wife, who works as speech therapist in a primary school, told me how she uses a Japanese storytelling technique called kamishibai, or “paper drama”. This took me by surprise, as usually, I am the one introducing new Japanese things at home. This time, however, my wife floored me with an ippon as I had never heard about this paper drama.

I did some research and found out that kamishibai is a form of street theatre that originated in Tokyo in the 1920s. It consists of portable wooden mini theatres in A3 format attached to a bicycle. Kamishibai is part of a long tradition of picture storytelling, dating back to the 9th or 10th century when priests used illustrated scrolls combined with narration to convey Buddhist doctrine to lay audiences.



Then, a few months ago, Eef, a business development manager at Yamagata Europe, called me and asked: “Geert, have you heard of kamishibai? It seems to come from Japan and some companies use something like it to present themselves instead of using boring PowerPoints.”

Now, I’m always open to new ideas, dislike PowerPoint very much and prick up my ears when somebody starts a sentence with the words “in Japan”. It was a multi-layered bingo which motivated me to further dig into the topic.



And finally, the magic happened. Just after Eef’s call, I was attending a business event at VOKA in Ghent. I was talking to someone, and when I asked him about his company, he took something from his jacket. It was a card with a story plate, which he used to tell me his company’s story. I interpreted this as a direct sign from the Japanese god of storytelling. The next morning, I put my marketing team into action.

I called my friend Dirk from OSKAR D, the company in charge of the corporate visuals and website for the BJA, and asked him: “*Do you know what a story plate is? And can you support my team in creating a story plate that presents the value proposition of Yamagata Europe?*”



OSKAR D presented us with three possible approaches: the infographic approach, the manga approach, and the isometric approach. We chose the isometric approach, worked on it together with OSKAR D, and exploded the story plate into a story wall of 2,5 by 3,5 meters in our office.

Kamishibai with a strong local touch – that is how local traditions become global trends.

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All of our bilingual / bicultural recruitment consultants are good at sourcing multilingual diverse talent, including Japanese native / local professionals who may fit well in Japanese corporate culture.



Since we started working with and successfully supporting Japanese companies, we decided to join BJA to further contribute to more Japanese companies in Belgium.

We are excited to meet members at events!



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