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Chamber of Commerce
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EDITORIAL

By Noboru Ogasa, President of Sumitomo Benelux,
Nihonjinkai President and BJA Vice-President

It is a great honor and privilege for me to assume the role of Vice-President of the Belgium-Japan Association & Chamber of Commerce. I am very much looking forward to continuing collaborating with my dearest colleagues of BJA.

I work for a Japanese general trading firm, or “Sogo-Shosha” in Japanese. This is a unique business model that blends export-import trading and private equity investments but with much longer and hands-on shareholding. Before setting foot in Belgium in May 2023, my experiences of living abroad are 5 years in the US during childhood, and another 4 years in the US and 3 years in the Philippines under company assignment. By this fact alone, you can assume that I am under a strong American influence, including my English accent. So, Europe was somewhere physically and mentally far from me, but here I am, in the “Capital of Europe”. I am so much enjoying both professional and private life here in Belgium.

This is my second “Editorial”, since the December 2023 issue where I wrote about local foods and wines that I was pleasantly surprised to discover after my arrival to Belgium. 2 years have passed since then, and I had more surprises. For example, “I met the King and shook hands” which I would not have imagined that someday I would say out loud. I visited many prestigious colleague companies and institutions which enabled me to understand better the landscape and strength of Belgian

businesses and technologies. I also attended many events to mingle with our members that were held in historical and exclusive venues.

These were all attributed to well-planned and well-executed events of BJA.

I do hope that more members will take advantage of these privileges to further accelerate business and personal collaborations between two countries. I will do my best in my capacity as new president of the Japanese Association in Belgium, the Nihonjinkai, to influence our Japanese colleagues to join BJA for those who have not done so yet, and to participate more to the BJA events for those who are already a BJA member.

Next year will mark the 160th anniversary of Belgium-Japan friendship since both countries signed the Treaty on Amity, Commerce and Navigation in 1866. Belgium was the 9th country to reach out and open an official diplomatic relation with Japan, after Japan finally opened the country after 215 years of “Sakoku”, the isolationist foreign policy. The Belgian National Bank was also an organizational, institutional and architectural model for the National Bank of Japan back then. Modern Japan owes much to Belgium.

The BJA is part of the Preparation Committee of the 160th anniversary events together with the Embassy of Japan and



Noboru Ogasa

the Japanese Association in Belgium. We have so far gathered considerable funds and payment-in-kinds to enable various events to celebrate and further promote friendship of two countries. Thank you very much for those who had already contributed for this occasion. The planning of events that we will host or participate, are on-going. We are considering participating in big events as a country of honor, and to host several receptions to those pre-planned events that are themed on Japan or on the Belgium-Japan relationship. But our wish list of events is longer than what we can afford with the contribution that we gathered so far. I would like to ask for your kind understanding and consideration for those who wish to step up and help us make 160th anniversary year even more exciting. Please do contact BJA office for further details. We are very much looking forward to hearing from you!

Thank you one again for your kind support and consideration to help realize the mission of BJA, “Promoting business and cultural relations between Belgium, Europe and Japan”. Let us continue to work together.

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A Journey of Innovation and Connection:

BELGIUM-JAPAN BUSINESS MISSION 2025

From the tranquil tea gardens of Tokyo to cutting-edge innovation hubs in Osaka, and from traditional sake breweries to the futuristic vision of Expo 2025, the recent business mission to Japan — attended by representatives of the Belgium-Japan Association & Chamber of Commerce (BJA) — was a rich blend of cultural heritage and forward-looking enterprise.

Professor Gilbert Declerck, Board Member of imec International and BJA President, together with Anja Oto-Kellens, BJA Executive Director, represented the BJA on invitation from JTI during the mission from 7 May to 18 May 2025. The program unfolded in two phases: the JTI mission, followed by the broader VOKA Flemish-Brabant delegation. Together, these initiatives brought together Belgian executives, entrepreneurs, and officials to foster connection and explore opportunities in one of the world's most dynamic economies.

A Warm Welcome: Strategic Conversations and Cultural Encounters

The mission began with a visit to the Japan Tokyo Headquarters of Japan Tobacco (JT), one of Japan's prominent multinational companies. A high-level meeting with Japan Tobacco Inc. President & CEO Mr Masamichi Terabatake and Tabaknatie CEO Mrs Brigitte Heyndrickx, and their delegations, opened the floor to productive discussions on market strategies, innovation, and global partnerships. The longstanding relationship between the Belgian and Japanese companies was palpable — a testament to decades of trust and collaboration.

That evening, a cultural and business insights exchange and networking

gathering with ICC Japan was enriched by the surprise appearance of Mr Oji Hitomi, former BJA Board Member and past President of Sumitomo Benelux. A sake tasting provided the perfect setting for reconnecting and celebrating shared histories.

The evening ended in a renowned Tofu Restaurant in Shibuya — the start of an encounter with culinary discoveries and anime creation.

Innovation and Inspiration in Tokyo

Over the weekend, the JTI Mission group explored the Miraikan — National Museum of Emerging Science and Innovation, delving into the frontiers of AI, robotics, and sustainability. A traditional teppanyaki dinner in Ginza added a flavorful close to the day.

Sunday offered a slower pace, with a serene city tour on the Sky Hop Bus followed by a visit to a Ceramics Museum, a visit through an intriguing area of Tokyo, ending with an elegant dinner at Nobu - enjoying the historic ambiance of Hotel Chinzanso Tokyo.

Connecting Regions: The VOKA Delegation Arrives

On 11 May, the VOKA Flemish Brabant delegation arrived and the JTI Delegation joined the second part of the mission, launching the next chapter focused on Expo 2025 Osaka under the theme "Designing Future Society for Our Lives," with key pillars: Saving Lives, Connecting Lives, Empowering Lives. These themes echoed through the visits and partnerships formed in the days ahead.

Highlights from the Business Mission

12 May – Tradition and Energy





The day began with a cultural visit to the Meiji Shrine and Harajuku. In the afternoon, participants visited the headquarters of JERA Co., Inc., a major Japanese energy company born from the joint venture between TEPCO Fuel & Power and Chubu Electric Power. JERA plays a pivotal role in the global energy transition through investments in renewables and innovative energy technologies. In 2021, JERA acquired a majority stake in Parkwind, a Flemish offshore wind developer based in Leuven — a move that further solidified its European presence.

The day concluded with a networking reception at the Belgian Embassy, hosted by H.E. Ambassador Antoine Evrard. Delegates from Flemish Brabant, West-Flanders, and Mechelen mingled, capping the evening with karaoke — a joyful immersion into Japanese hospitality.

13 May – Logistics and Heritage

The morning featured a visit to Nippon Express' NEX-Auto Logistics Facility (NEX-ALFA) – an advanced showroom

logistics center, equipped with AI and IoT technology, offering groundbreaking solutions for more efficient and labor-saving logistics processes. We were introduced to impressive equipment such as AutoStore, a robotic storage system that maximizes storage space; EVE, an automated transport robot that enhances storage efficiency; Projection Picking System, a digital order-picking system using image recognition technology; and to the RFID Tunnel Gate, enabling efficient inspections using RFID tags.

That afternoon, the group visited the Izumibashi Sake Brewery, founded in 1857. This family-owned brewery cultivates its own rice and merges traditional methods with modern practices to produce high-quality sake — exported globally, including to Belgium — to purchase via BJA Member, www.kaori.be. A guided tour and sake tasting offered deep insight into craftsmanship and export potential.

Later, the group boarded the Shinkansen to Osaka.

14 May – Expo 2025: A Global Vision

A highlight of the day was the visit to the Belgian Pavilion at Expo 2025 Osaka, located in the “Saving Lives” zone. The pavilion showcased Belgium’s innovation in health tech, biotech, and medtech. A networking dinner brought together key stakeholders — and served up culinary specialties from Flemish Brabant, delighting all.

15 May – R&D and Manufacturing Excellence

Visits to Nitto’s Inovas Innovation Center and the Komatsu Osaka Plant offered deep dives into Japan’s strengths in advanced manufacturing.

The Inovas Innovation Center in Ibaraki fosters interdisciplinary collaboration in R&D, with a strong focus on co-creation and human resource development.

Komatsu, founded in 1921, is one of the world’s leading manufacturers of construction machinery. The Osaka plant specializes in hydraulic excavators and sustainable innovations, such as hybrid models. In Europe, Komatsu op-





© Pictures taken by courtesy of JTI, NEX, ZOCCALO, BJA

erates a distribution hub in Vilvoorde, Belgium.

The day concluded with an unforgettable dinner at Kanga-an Temple in Kyoto, including a graceful Geisha performance — an elegant celebration of Japanese culture.

16 May – Optical Precision

The delegation visited Tokai Optical Co., Ltd. – Okazaki Plant, welcomed as well by Mr Kurt Leuridan, CEO of Tokai Optecs in Tienen, VOKA Flemish-Brabant Ambassador for Japan, and BJA Investment Committee Chair, alongside his Japanese partner Mr Hirokazu Furuzawa, President & CEO of Tokai Optical Co., Ltd. Participants observed the production of over 18,000 progressive lenses daily, followed by lunch in the company cafeteria — a rare window into Japanese

workplace culture. In the afternoon, a tour of the Tokai Thin Film Factory revealed cutting-edge technologies used in products such as televisions, gaming consoles, and telescopes.

The day ended at Sodoh Higashiyama in Kyoto.

17 May – Cultural Closure

The final day offered space for cultural reflection. A visit to the National Museum of Kyoto, a Tempura lunch, and a traditional Matcha tea ceremony brought a serene conclusion to the mission. Later that evening, the delegation returned to Belgium, continuing conversations and partnerships on the flight back to Brussels.

Reflections

The business mission by JTI joining into

the Japan Mission Program of VOKA Flemish Brabant was a resounding success, blending economic insight with cultural exchange and innovation. It reaffirmed the enduring strength of Belgium-Japan ties and opened new avenues for collaboration in energy, technology, logistics, manufacturing, and life sciences.

The BJA expresses its deepest appreciation to all participants, hosts, and organizers whose dedication made this mission possible. A heartfelt bow of gratitude goes to Jeroen Dhanens, Corporate Affairs & Communications Director Belux of JTI for his leadership and support to the BJA, and to Kris Claes, CEO, and Tuba Gungor, International Trade Advisor, VOKA Flemish Brabant, for their warm hospitality and coordination.



BJA Exclusive Lunch Meeting “Single Permit: Where Are We and Where Are We Going?” 特別昼食会:「シングルパーミットー現状と今後の展望」

Tuesday, 20 May 2025 – University Foundation, Brussels



Kurt Leuridan



Attorney Frank Judo



Attorney Bernard Caris



Matthias Lommers

On 20 May 2025, the Belgium-Japan Association & Chamber of Commerce (BJA) Investment Committee was pleased to invite all to an exclusive and fully booked lunch meeting focused on the critical topic of the Single Permit, a subject of paramount importance for Japanese companies and expatriates in Belgium.

Generously co-organized by the Dutch-speaking Order of the Brussels Bar Association at the prestigious University Foundation Brussels, the event was opened by Kurt Leuridan, BJA Investment Committee Chair and CEO of Tokai Optecs, with a warm welcome. The meeting featured keynote insights from Attorney Frank Judo, Dean of the Dutch-speaking Order of the Brussels Bar Association. Attorney Bernard Caris, a leading specialist in business immigration, offered a detailed examination of the work and residence permit process from both legal and practical viewpoints. Additionally, Matthias Lommers, Partner at Deloitte and BJA Legal & Tax Committee member, shared firsthand experiences and concerns voiced by the Japanese business community, highlighting challenges such as administrative complexity and integration course

issues. Wim Eynatten, Partner at Deloitte, and BJA Legal & Tax Committee Chair, expertly moderated the session.

The event was further enriched by the presence of representatives from Minister Anneleen Van Bossuyt's Cabinet, alongside officials from the Japanese Embassy in Belgium, underscoring the significance of the dialogue and reinforcing bilateral cooperation – together with the (Japanese) business community representatives.

This meeting served as an important preparatory platform for the BJA's policy engagement with Minister Van Bossuyt on 4 June, aimed at advancing practical improvements in the Single Permit process and integration frameworks.



Left to right: Wim Eynatten, Partner Deloitte and BJA Legal & Tax Committee Chair; Matthias Lommers, Partner Deloitte, Kurt Leuridan, CEO of Tokai Optecs and BJA Investment Committee Chair; Attorney Bernard Caris, Partner Tilia Law; Minister Shigeta Oeda, Deputy Chief of Mission, Embassy of Japan in Belgium; Attorney Frank Judo, Dean of the Dutch-speaking Order of the Brussels Bar Association



Exclusive Luncheon with Her Excellency Minister Anneleen Van Bossuyt, Minister of Asylum, Migration, Social Integration, and responsible for Urban Policy 亡命・移民・社会統合担当大臣兼都市政策担当大臣アンネリーン・ファン・ボスサイト氏を交えた特別昼食会

Wednesday, 4 June 2025 - Deloitte, Zaventem



Her Excellency Minister Anneleen Van Bossuyt, Minister of Asylum, Migration, Social Integration, and responsible for Urban Policy engaged in an open dialogue.



Gathering for a souvenir photo: (left to right) Kurt Leuridan, CEO of Tokai Optecs and BJA Investment Committee Chair, Her Excellency Minister Anneleen Van Bossuyt, Minister Shigeta Oeda of the Embassy of Japan in Belgium, Wim Eynatten, Partner at Deloitte and BJA Legal & Tax Committee Chair, and Prof Gilbert Declerck, Member of the Board of imec and BJA President.



Minister Shigeta Oeda of Embassy of Japan in Belgium extended his deep appreciation to Minister Van Bossuyt for taking this subject of importance to the Japanese community seriously.

On Wednesday, 4 June 2025, the Belgium-Japan Association & Chamber of Commerce (BJA) proudly organized an exclusive luncheon with Her Excellency Minister Anneleen Van Bossuyt, Minister of Asylum, Migration, Social Integration, and responsible for Urban Policy. The event, co-organized by the BJA Legal & Tax Committee and the BJA Investment Committee, was generously hosted at Deloitte Gateway and brought together key stakeholders from the Japanese business community in Belgium for a high-level policy dialogue.

Building upon a previous session held on 20 May, this luncheon provided a unique opportunity for BJA members to engage directly with the Minister on matters critical to the Japanese corporate and expatriate community—most notably, the Single Permit system and the integration trajectory for foreign workers and their families.

The discussion was opened by BJA Committee Chairs, Wim Eynatten, Partner at Deloitte, and Kurt Leuridan, CEO of Tokai Optecs, who emphasized the importance of ongoing engagement between the government and international business actors. They were followed by Nathalie Vanmontfort, Marketing Manager at Tokai Optecs, who delivered an inspiring speech on young women entrepreneurs in today's world. Minister Van Bossuyt then presented the Federal Government's vision on economic migration, underlining the role of high-skilled foreign talent in sustaining Belgium's future economic competitiveness.

Notable contributions came from Minister Shigeta Oeda, Deputy Chief of Mission of the Japanese Embassy, and representatives of leading Japanese companies including Daikin Europe, Toyota Motor Europe, Mitsui & Co. Benelux, and JETRO. These stakeholders raised pressing concerns regarding the practical challenges of the current migration process—such as lengthy processing times, administrative opacity, regional discrepancies, and barriers to family integration. The candid and thoughtful feedback from the practitioners who work with these procedures day in and day out was greatly appreciated as well.

Minister Van Bossuyt responded with candor and pragmatism, expressing her appreciation for the input and reaffirming Belgium's strong ties with Japan. She committed to prioritizing improvements in the system, including digitization, increased staffing, and the implementation of parallel processing measures. While acknowledging the structural complexities of Belgium's regional and federal system, she conveyed her determination to drive tangible progress.

Minister Van Bossuyt was praised for her transparency and responsiveness, inspiring the participants into engaged and constructive contributions. This event not only deepened the dialogue on migration policy but also reinforced the collaborative spirit between Belgium and Japan—vital to ensuring an environment where Japanese businesses and expatriates can thrive.





BRIDGING CULTURES ON A GLOBAL STAGE

Pianist and composer Daniel Verstappen at World Expo Osaka 2025 and Beyond

by Tania Ghyselinck (Blogger/consultant ArtistCongratz)

Flanders Investment & Trade invited the pianist-composer and BJA member Daniel Verstappen to perform at World Expo 2025 Osaka in celebration of Flanders Day, along with other unique venues across Japan. Known for blending classical, cinematic, and cross-cultural influences, Daniel's music carries a message that resonated powerfully at the heart of the Expo.

Daniel, you're constantly building bridges between cultures — and with nature. In June, you've been part of World Expo 2025 in Japan. How do you feel looking back on this new highlight of your Reconnection-tour?

Daniel: I was deeply moved, on all levels! From the food to the culture and everyday life, everything was so rich and layered. I explored both the vibrant cities and the peaceful nature. Each brought something unique.

But above all, my heart is filled with warmth and love from the many connections I made, both on a professional level and through powerful moments with the

audience. The Japanese are incredibly curious and respectful. When they connect with something, they stay until the very last note. In complete silence. That kind of presence is unforgettable.

Being at the Expo itself is magical. It's like the world gathered on a small island. That kind of closeness makes you feel how connected we really are, and how music can flow across borders without words.

Tell us about your outdoor performance near the Belgian Pavilion as part of Flanders Day and your experience on and off stage.

Daniel: It felt like a crossroad of cultures — a moment where music became a form of diplomacy. Together with shakuhachi master Seimo Yamaguchi, we musically welcomed the official delegation from Flanders, including Minister-President Matthias Diependaele.

The organization requested for something intimate yet powerful, so I created a set that blended my own compositions with well-known Japanese melodies.

"The Flemish Week at Expo Osaka 2025 was the ideal moment to highlight the strengths and opportunity of our region. And what better way to create meaningful connections than through music? We were proud to have Daniel and Seimo move and inspire our guests. Throughout the day, they showed how collaboration across cultures can lead to truly magical results."

Annalin Van Biesen,
Deputy Director
Trade East Asia,
Flanders Investment & Trade



Raising flags and music with shakuhachi master Seimo Yamaguchi



Daniel Verstappen in the presence of Minister-President Matthias Diependaele, HE Antoine Evrard (Ambassador of Belgium in Japan), Miriam Cops (Director of Belexpo), Eduard van Kleunen (Deputy Head of Mission), and Belgian designer Katerin Theys.

Especially for Flanders Day, I arranged a new version of an iconic Flemish folksong “Ik zag Cecilia komen”. That moment really brought everything together — heritage, connection, and emotion.

Even in the heat the audience remained fully engaged. Afterwards, during the rooftop reception at the Belgian Pavilion, I also had the chance to meet the Belgian Delegation, including my fashion designer, Katerin Theys. Our very first encounter added a personal and emotional touch to an already unforgettable day.

You also performed at the Poland Pavilion, a space for intercultural dialogue and creative collaboration. How did that setting resonate with your own artistic mission?

Daniel: Performing at the Poland Pavilion felt completely aligned with the heart of my Bridge Between Cultures project. With Seimo, we blended piano and traditional Japanese flute in harmony with their theme: “Heritage That Drives the Future.” It was inspiring to be part of a space committed to international collaboration at that level.

This was more than a performance — it was a dialogue, a shared moment between cultures. And that’s exactly what

I hope to keep creating with this project, wherever it goes.

You also performed solo at the Czech and USA Pavilions — which brought you back to your Reconnection World Tour, such as Rudolfinum Prague and Carnegie Hall New York. How did it feel to perform in those world-class venues and then again at the Expo?

Daniel: It was truly profound — like coming full circle in my musical journey. Exactly one year ago, I was performing in all these iconic concert halls. And now, performing at the Expo in this setting gave it a whole new layer of meaning.

It reminded me how far this journey has taken me, and how music keeps connecting people across continents.

The audience at both the USA and Czech Pavilions was incredibly enthusiastic, which gave me so much energy. Both had vibrant cultural programs — and the Czech Pavilion had even created a beautiful indoor concert space with a circular design that made the atmosphere feel intimate and focused. It was the kind of setting where every note could breathe and connect directly with the audience. For these performances, I crafted a solo set combining my own compositions, cinematic improvisations and film music.

“Mr Verstappen’s performance at the Czech Pavilion was a very special moment — his music brought a unique emotional depth to our space. We are grateful for the opportunity to collaborate with such a gifted artist and proud that the Czech Pavilion could serve as a meeting point for meaningful artistic and international exchange.”

Ondřej Soška, Czech
Commissioner General, Expo
Osaka 2025

Shakuhachi is one of Japan’s most iconic instruments, with Seimo you created a cross-cultural duet — not only at the Expo, but also in Kobe, Sasayama, and at Sunset Hall in Osaka. How did that collaboration come alive? What stood out for you in these performances?

Daniel: Actually, it was Sunset Hall in Osaka who proposed working with Seimo, after I explained my concept and storyline. From our very first video call, it felt like a perfect connection, both musically and personally.

During the concerts, the audience was visibly moved by the unique blend of piano and shakuhachi. Our styles of composing really complement each other. We are making plans for a continued collaboration.

The concert at Sunset Hall was stunning. The hall overlooks Osaka Bay right next to the Expo. Performing here just before sunset, created an inspiring and atmospheric experience.

But the most meaningful concert for me was in Sasayama, at the Houmei Sake Brewery. I performed inside a centuries-old wooden hall — part of a historic sake brewery that dates back to 1797. After the concert, a woman



“Daniel Verstappen’s performance at the USA Pavilion was a standout moment of Expo 2025.

His music resonated deeply with our audience and beautifully reflected the Expo’s spirit of collaboration and cultural connection. We were honored to host him, and grateful for the bridge he built between our nations through his art.”

Rami Shakra,
Director, USA Pavilion, Expo
Osaka 2025.

came to me in tears and said she hadn’t cried in ten years — and that finally, everything made sense for her. That moment deeply touched me and will stay with me forever.

There’s something magical about the place: the sake is exposed to classical music during fermentation — they believe that playing composers like Beethoven and Mozart to the barrels enhances the flavour. I tasted it — and it was exceptional. I even brought some bottles home and now keep them next to my piano as a poetic memory.

You also connected on a fashionable level with Hong Kong-based Belgian

designer Katerin Theys. Tell us about your collaboration.

Daniel: I first wore one of Katerin’s designs during my concert in Belgium for World Piano Day in Alden Biesen. I loved it so much and we connected right away.

For the Asian tour we selected 10 creations of her collection, each one telling its own story through colour, shape, and texture. Her designs felt completely in tune with my music and vision.

So I definitely see our collaboration continuing beyond this tour.

You’ve performed in the presence of the Belgian Royal Family several times, including HRH Princess Astrid. How did it feel to represent Belgium in such an esteemed company?

Daniel: It was a truly great honour. I performed in Dubai at the World Expo in the presence of King Philippe and Queen Mathilde and earlier this year in Mumbai during the Belgian Economic Mission led by HRH Princess Astrid. Her presence gave a strong sense of support for Belgian culture abroad.

Princess Astrid also visited the Expo in Osaka last June, just weeks before my concerts in Japan. Although she wasn’t present during my performance, it felt symbolic.

Are you planning to return to Japan soon?

Daniel: Yes, absolutely. We’re already preparing my return in fall 2026 as part of my Asia tour, including South Korea, China, and Japan.

This journey felt like a beginning, not

an end, I look forward to build even more cultural bridges through music.

What will you remember most about this journey, and how did it inspire you creatively?

Daniel: Too many moments, to be honest. The concerts, the people, the energy. But also the quiet, emotional moments left a deep impression. Visiting Kyoto and Nara, walking among the temples and feeding the deer, surrounded by nature... It all gave me the space to reflect and reconnect.

It moved me. Not only as a performer but also as a composer. I even started writing new music on the spot. Pieces that carry the stillness and beauty I found in those places, and they’ll definitely be part of the new album I’m working on now.

My music is born from personal stories, and I came back to Belgium with a heart — and a notebook — full of inspiration.

“It was a beautiful experience to witness two worlds come together during the sunset concert, a harmony of culture, sound, and style.

Seeing Daniel wearing my designs -created with deep admiration for Asian aesthetics, yet rooted in Belgian essence- alongside Seimo in his traditional Japanese attire, was deeply moving. Watching these elements blend so naturally on stage felt like a true celebration of cultural connection, a moment I will always treasure.”

Katerin Theys



BJA & BLCCJ Webinar with Belgian Pavilion Director Myriam Cops 「ベルギーパビリオンの魅力とは？館長ミリアム・コップス氏が語る」

Thursday, 22 May 2025 – Zoom Platform



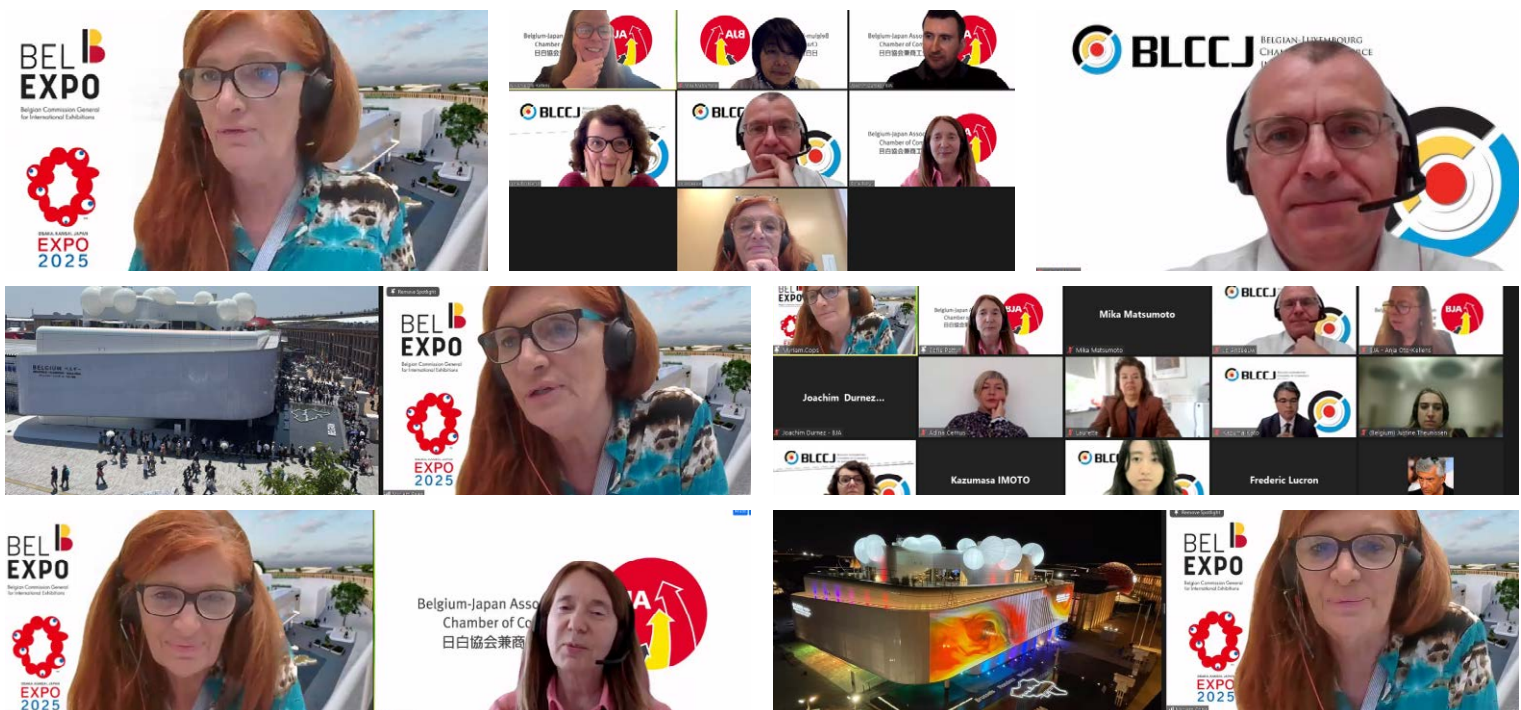
Sofie Pattyn (top right), CTO, IQVIA Laboratories Belgium and BJA IPT Committee Co-Chair together with Jo Anseeuw (below), Managing Director at Materialise Japan Co., Ltd./ BLCCJ Director & member of the BLCCJ webinar task force introducing Myriam Cops, Belgian Pavilion Director, to the audience.

The Belgium-Japan Association & Chamber of Commerce (BJA), in collaboration with the Belgian-Luxembourg Chamber of Commerce in Japan (BLCCJ), hosted the second session of the dynamic three-part webinar series on 22 May 2025. This session focused on the upcoming Expo 2025 in Osaka, with special emphasis on the Belgian Pavilion.

Belgian Pavilion Director Myriam Cops delivered an insightful presentation on the strategies behind leading the pavilion to success. She highlighted valuable opportunities for companies to expand their networks by connecting with innovative partners and gaining exposure to cutting-edge ideas showcased at the Expo. Attendees also received practical advice on how to maximize their experience at Expo Osaka, whether planning an onsite visit or engaging remotely.

Moderated by Sofie Pattyn, BJA IPT Committee Co-Chair and CTO of IQVIA Laboratories Belgium, alongside Jo Anseeuw, Managing Director at Materialise Japan and BLCCJ Director, the session offered a vibrant discussion and an interactive Q&A that addressed participants' questions in real time.

The Team of BelExpo, together with Mrs Cops, created a video walk-through the Belgian Pavillion – given an exclusive insight behind the scenes. This precious contribution is available through: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SgkbrhqaP3o>. This webinar reinforced both chambers' commitment to supporting Japanese and Belgian businesses in seizing global opportunities and strengthening bilateral collaboration through platforms like Osaka Expo 2025.



BELGIANS & JAPAN

EDWARD DE BEUKELAER

By Geert Benoit, Managing Director Yamagata Europe, BJA Editorial Committee Chair, and Dirk De haene, Managing Director Oskar D and BJA Editorial Committee Member

Before we dive into the interview, we will offer some background information on the interviewee in an introduction that may be useful to our readers.

Mr De Beukelaer is obviously very well known as Director in the BJA and as one of the three BJA Vice-Presidents, and has been active in the association since its inception. Very recently, he has decided to step down as Chairman of the Editorial Committee. Two members of the

committee who both act as freelance interviewers for the Trade Flows, Dirk De haene and Geert Benoit, decided to do a joint interview with Mr De Beukelaer to highlight the importance of the occasion. Since Mr De Beukelaer doesn't like to be at the center of attention, it took some persuading to have him agree to do the interview. However, with the support of our Executive Director Ms Anja Oto-Kellens, we managed to put it on the agenda.

We did have some stress about how to tackle the interview, but Mr De Beukelaer was so kind as to invite us into his private home near Antwerp for the talk. The atmosphere, the nice summer weather and the presence of his wife set us all at ease and opened the

door to a long and warm conversation. It is hard to fully capture the scene in these written lines, but hopefully you can transport your mind there as you read through the transcript.



Dirk & Geert: We know you as the CEO of a company that imported and distributed Japanese cameras and medical optical equipment in Belgium and keeps distributing lenses from Tamron along with other photographic and digital services. Could you tell us more about your professional activities?

Ede: Having studied law, my first career was as an Attorney. However, Mr Hugo De Beukelaer, my uncle owned a company that distributed cameras and other optical equipment (for mainly Japanese products). The company was established in 1949, and I took over the business in 1985. We were distributors for Nikon, Olympus, Minolta, Pentax, Tamron, ...

(Note from Geert: attentive readers of Trade Flows will recognise these brands from advertisements in Trade Flows issues spanning many years).

Personally, I am not a photographer. My interest in the products was of course focused on their usability but as well as their look and feel. In other words, I saw a camera as a personal accessory. The product had to be "vendable et donnable" ('sellable and giftable').

Obviously, the photographic and camera business has gone through many changes over the years. The large brands have built their own distribution network in Europe, and the mobile phone has replaced the compact digital camera. However, the top brands are still the same, and they are Japanese. What is less known however, is that my

company has always been dominantly active in the medical optical sector (endoscopy and microscopes), with Olympus Medical as our main brand.

Dirk & Geert: The Japanese link is clear, but how did this bring you to the BJA?

Ede: The person who brought me to the BJA was Mr Jean-Albert Moorkens. You must understand that in the late eighties, the Western world tended towards strong protectionism against Japanese imports. Japanese products, mainly cars, were successfully competing with the European brands and offered great quality at affordable pricing. This is the economic background that motivated Mr Jean-Albert Moorkens to act. In line with an existing organisation in The Netherlands called DUJAT, he took the initiative to create BEJAT in 1987.

The Moorkens family was importer of Mitsubishi Motors, and it was important for them to cooperate with other importers of Japanese cars, at that time mainly Mr Jacques Beherman (Mazda), Mr Takahata (Nissan/Datsun) and Inchcape, the British importer of Toyota for the Belgian market. It was the strong belief of Mr Moorkens, however, that the initiative should have a broader platform than just the automotive importers, so people from the consumer electronics sectors (mainly Sony with Mr Paselecq) and the optical & camera sectors (myself) were also invited. Mr Frans Blondé, well introduced in assisting Japanese companies in their communication had immediately joined as a founding member.

Very soon, the Blondé family became involved in the administrative and promotional side of the organisation.

The aim was to create an association that would foster communication between Japanese and European businesses and lobby the authorities for an open economy and open trade. The first ambition was to get as many importers of Japanese products around the table as possible, and we succeeded in that. In a later phase, we started to focus on getting the Japanese companies on board.

Then, in 1991, the BJA was created from the merger of two organisations: the "Association Belgo-japonaise" (1963) and the "Belgian-Japanese Trade Federation" or BEJAT (1987).

One of our most significant choices in the BJA was to consistently select a Captain of Industry as our President. Today we have Professor Declerck (imec), and in the past we have had Mr Leysen (Umicore), Mr Willame (AGC Glaverbel), Mr Velghe (Bekaert) and others.

Dirk & Geert: Was there an Editorial Committee from the beginning?

Ede: Not really, but from the very beginning, the organisation had a basic structure with committees that were in line with the aims of the association. Committees like the Export Committee, the Investment Committee, and the Cultural Committee were created from the very start.

The Export Committee was led by Mr Beherman. We wanted to show that trade

works in two directions and motivate the Belgian companies to think about Japan. Japan was unfortunately known to have a type of economy that is difficult to enter, but we wanted to show the attractiveness of a market that then had the ambition and focus to become the largest economy in the world.

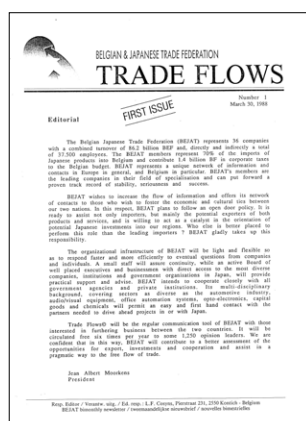
The Investment Committee was created with the aim to spread information about Belgium towards Japanese companies.

We were less focused on cultural exchange in the early days, but this aspect became more important when the BJA merged with the Association Belgo-japonaise. This organisation was led by two brilliant former Ambassadors, and among their members, Mr Dominique le Hodey was very active in the organisation. This new team was more focused on the cultural rather than economic field. So, it was no surprise that, after the merger, Mr le Hodey took up the responsibility of organizing the Cultural Committee.

During that period, an Editorial Committee was created with the goal to further write and publish about the activities of the BJA.

Dirk & Geert: So, when did the idea come up to create a newsletter, or a "Trade Flows"?

From the very beginning, there was a clear vision that we should not only maintain and organize our activities but also report and share what we were doing. We wanted to report internally



March 1988



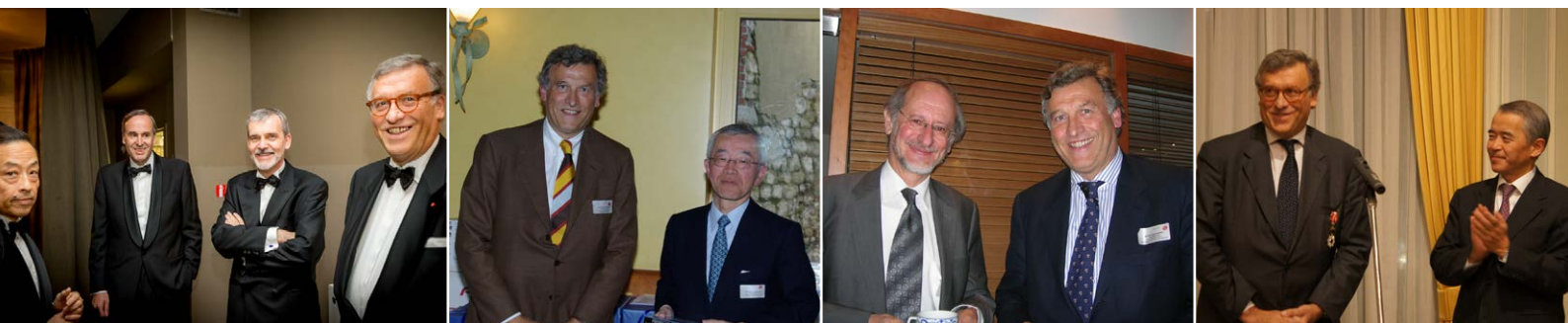
June 1992



December 1995



March 1998



among the committees and to the members, but also towards the Belgian and Japanese authorities and towards the external world, to whoever showed interest in Japan.

The first start of Trade Flows was a newsletter presenting facts and figures about trade and economy, created by Lucien F. Cosijns. The first issue of the Trade Flows was published in March 1988. Soon Mr Moorkens wanted to further professionalise the publication and later asked Ms Ann Blondé to support the team. This was the start of what today is known as Trade Flows.

Dirk & Geert: What are some crucial milestones in the history of “Trade Flows”?

In recent years, the move from print to digital was of course a big step. However, given my background in photography, I am not really nostalgic about this digitization. This was mainly a financial decision, and absolutely the correct decision. We need a medium through which we could communicate and share, but the nature of that medium will always change, and above all, “content is key”.

Speaking of the content, I would like to

briefly thank all of the contributors from the different committees, but especially Professor Willy Vande Walle for his fantastic articles with interesting details and nice anecdotes. I especially want to make mention of the series he wrote about the 150 years of diplomatic relations.

More important than the move from print to digital were the discussions we have had about adding more pictures, and the visual reporting on the BJA events. I have always been a fan of this visualisation and (what I call) “the Paris Match” aspect of Trade Flows. Add visuals and pictures of the people who share and participate. Not everybody liked this, and some wanted to stick to more formal and ‘serious’ content, but I am happy that we could convince everybody of adding the value of this lighter touch in our publications.

Dirk & Geert: When did you first visit Japan?

Ede: My first visit was in 1981. Because the companies we represented in Belgium usually also had a strong presence in Europe, visits to Japan were not that crucial for my business. We had more regular contact with the Japanese man-

agers on the European side than with the Japanese HQ. But given the usual 3-year rotation of Japanese managers, we organically created a network in Japan that gave us interesting contacts at HQ, even if this was not required from a business standpoint. Consequently, my visits consisted more of generic networking than business negotiation meetings. I went every few years and usually stayed for a few weeks. That also gave me time to immerse myself in the old Japan, and visit the temples in the mountains around Kyoto, my favourite area in Japan.

I have always loved the way our Japanese relations respected the position of importers and distributors. They are eager to learn and realize our closeness to the market and end-users. In that sense, we even contributed to the creation of a successful product for one of our clients, when we convinced their visiting engineers to create an autofocus compact SLR camera with a built-in large zoom lens. This product has proven to be extremely successful.

Dirk & Geert: What was the biggest BJA event for you, in your long career within the organization?

Ede: We had so many nice moments and events, but the most exceptional for me were all the activities we organised around the World Soccer Cup in Japan in 2002. That was when the unforgettable match between Japan and Belgium in Saitama took place, which ended in a nice 2-2. The atmosphere in the stadium was epic. However, for the BJA and the importance of Belgium-Japan relations, the organisation of the Mission and the dinner in the New Otani Hotel with over





800 participants was also a milestone. The then Belgian Crown Prince and the then Japanese Crown Prince both attended the event, which of course created possibilities for us to invite the highest level of Japanese directors and owners from the different Japanese companies that are active in Belgium.

Dirk & Geert: How do you see the future of Trade Flows?

Ede: (looks at us with a big smile) This is your job now!

(and then gets rather serious) Most of all I want to take the opportunity to immensely thank Anja and her team for all of their efforts to make all this work. I also want to thank the entire Editorial Committee and Dirk and his team to bring everything together in a nice layout. With combined efforts, the team managed to successfully create 148 valuable Trade Flows issues over the years.

Dirk & Geert: Ede, thank you for the nice talk, and all the fantastic work you have done for Trade Flows and the BJA so far. This is of course not a goodbye, as you will kindly remain a member of the Editorial Committee, and BJA Vice-President.

We left the house with the promise to enthusiastically and proudly continue the mission of Mr De Beukelaer. Granted, we may have felt some trepidation, but not for the tasks ahead. Instead, it was the traffic that worried us, considering Ed Sheeran was on stage in Antwerp that evening, leaving us with a bit of chaos to navigate our way through until we were finally in the clear.

BJA EDITORIAL COMMITTEE ANNOUNCEMENT

The BJA is pleased to announce the appointment of Mr Geert Benoit as the new Chair of the BJA Editorial Committee. Mr Benoit is the Founder and CEO of Yamagata Europe and serves as Director at Yamagata Corporation (Japan).

Holding a Master's degree in Chinese and Japanese Studies, complemented by postgraduate studies at Vlerick Business School, Mr Benoit has been active in the technical information industry since 1991. He has been involved with the BJA since 1994 and has served as a dedicated member of the Editorial Committee since 2015. In 1998, he founded Yamagata Europe, further contributing to the growth of cross-cultural and business ties between Europe and Japan.

Mr Benoit succeeds Mr Edward De Beukelaer, CEO and President of H. De Beukelaer & Co., who has led the Editorial Committee with great dedication and vision. The BJA expresses its heartfelt thanks to Mr De Beukelaer for his exemplary leadership and invaluable contributions. We are pleased to note that he will continue to serve as an active member of the Committee, as well as in his broader capacity as Vice-President of the BJA.

We warmly welcome Mr Benoit to his new role and look forward to his leadership.

If you are interested in joining and contributing actively to the Editorial Committee or any of our other committees, please do not hesitate to get in touch with us.

EU Committee news

CYBER RESILIENCE ACROSS BORDERS: BELGIUM, JAPAN, AND THE FUTURE OF EU CYBERSECURITY

By Wiktoria Bochenska, European Affairs Manager, Fujitsu and BJA EU Committee Member

Cybersecurity as a Strategic Priority for Belgium and the EU – and Japan's Vital Role

In today's hyper-connected global economy, cyber threats know of no borders. Attacks on critical infrastructure, ransomware, as well as supply chain vulnerabilities have become daily concerns— not just for companies, but for governments and citizens alike. In 2024 alone, the EU experienced more than 2,500 significant cyber incidents, with Belgium reporting a 30% rise in attacks on public and private infrastructure. These incidents disrupted healthcare systems, local government services, and industrial operations—highlighting the enormous financial and operational toll cyber threats impose on both business and the public sector.

Belgium, in response, has placed cybersecurity high on its calculated agenda. The European Union (EU) has as well. This push has moved quite far beyond just policy rhetoric and into the total area of concrete regulatory frameworks with international cooperation.

Among the EU's key allies in this mission is Japan—a nation possessing advanced technological capabilities, a continuing commitment to democratic values, and increasing engagement in the cybersecurity sphere. In 2023, the EU and Japan signed their first security

and defense partnership of all time. This agreement acknowledged cyber threats as essentially a mutual concern and furnished a solid basis for more deep cooperation on cyber resilience, technological standards, and critical infrastructure protection.

Because Belgium strengthens its cyber strategy (with the Cybersecurity Strategy 2.0 laying out objectives for 2025 and beyond), Japan's role as a partner has never been relevant. The two regions together are shaping of a cybersecurity architecture, one that is resilient but also inclusive and value-driven.

A key asset in Belgium's approach is the Centre for Cybersecurity Belgium (CCB), praised by experts for its proactive, strategic approach to national cybersecurity. The CCB has not only helped improve baseline security standards across sectors but is also recognized for its transparency, agile coordination with international partners, and effectiveness in raising awareness across businesses.

The EU's New Cybersecurity Regulatory Environment

The EU is going beyond discussions on cyber safety. It's making it a law. It's using three major rules to direct how governments, businesses, and suppli-

ers tackle cyber safety in the Unified Market. These rules also have consequences outside EU borders for global teammates, such as tech sellers and service providers based in Japan. One of these key laws is the Cyber Resilience Act (CRA). Passed in 2024, CRA is a game-changer in EU rules. It's the first of its type. Now all digital items and software sold in the EU have to follow tight cyber safety rules throughout their whole life.

The Cyber Resilience Act (CRA)

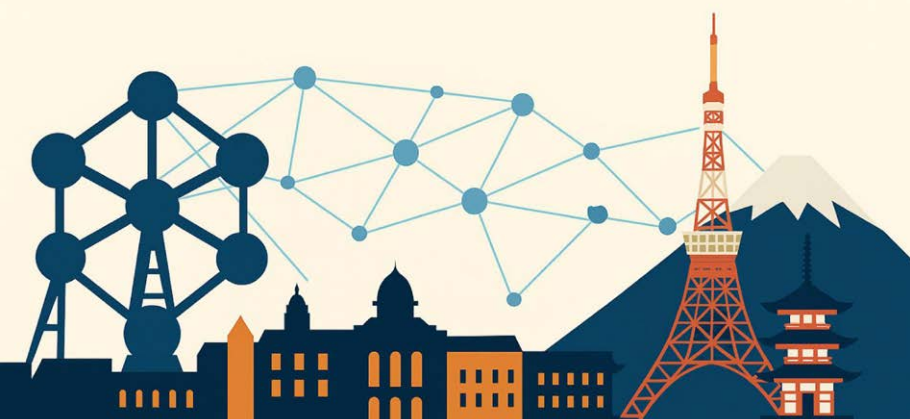
Adopted in 2024, the Cyber Resilience Act (CRA) represents a landmark shift in EU legislation. For the first time, digital products and software sold in the EU must meet strict cybersecurity standards across their entire lifecycle. The CRA covers a broad array of items—from consumer electronics to industrial control systems—and places the onus of cybersecurity firmly on manufacturers and developers.

Key CRA requirements include:

- › Security by design and by default
- › Regular security updates and vulnerability management
- › Clear communication of cybersecurity risks to users
- › Penalties are steep: non-compliance can result in fines of up to €15 million or 2.5% of global turnover. For Japanese exporters and tech providers, this means aligning their development and support systems with EU expectations—a change that encourages innovation, transparency, and trust.

The NIS2 Directive

The NIS2 Directive, which came into force in January 2023, builds on the EU's first cybersecurity directive (NIS1) by vastly expanding its scope and stringency. It applies to a wider set of sectors, including both public and private operators deemed “essential” or “im-



EU Committee news

portant,” such as telecommunications, digital infrastructure, manufacturing, and public administration.

Key obligations under NIS2:

- › Implementation of risk-based cybersecurity frameworks
- › Incident reporting within tight timeframes (24–72 hours)
- › Corporate accountability, with management liable for failures
- › Mandatory cooperation with national authorities

This regulation strengthens national cybersecurity capacities while creating a harmonized EU-wide framework. For international partners like Japan, it creates a predictable environment in which trusted suppliers and services can thrive.

The EU Cybersecurity Act

While the CRA and NIS2 focus on obligations and enforcement, the EU Cybersecurity Act—in force since 2019—plays a foundational role by establishing a voluntary certification framework for digital products and services. Spearheaded by ENISA (the EU Agency for Cybersecurity), this act helps improve transparency and build user trust.

The certification process has three levels of assurance (basic, substantial, and high), and Japan has already shown interest in interoperability between European and Japanese schemes. This creates a strong incentive for bilateral technical dialogue and opens the door for mutual recognition

mechanisms that can benefit exporters from both regions.

Building Bridges – The upcoming Belgium-Japan Cybersecurity event

The Belgium-Japan Association (BJA) will proudly host a high-level cybersecurity event in Brussels, co-organized with Japanese partners, to deepen the Japan-EU digital partnership. This dynamic event will go beyond policy discussions, bringing together key actors to explore best practices, share critical insights, and spark new initiatives for a secure digital future.

Designed to address both strategic and operational aspects of cybersecurity, the event will serve as a vibrant platform for navigating the evolving regulatory landscape shaped by the CRA, NIS2, and the EU Cybersecurity Act. It also aims to enhance resilience and trust across borders—both within industries and between policymakers.

Participants will engage with keynote speeches from top policymakers and industry thought leaders who will offer their vision for international cybersecurity cooperation. Rich panel discussions will examine urgent cybersecurity trends and regulatory developments, drawing on perspectives from both Japan and the EU. Attendees can also join targeted breakout sessions and workshops that dive into specific issues such as secure product design, incident response, and supply chain risk management. A dedicated B2B networking track will encourage busi-

ness leaders and technology providers to explore opportunities for partnerships, joint ventures, and collaborative research. To round off the experience, live demonstrations will showcase some of the most innovative cybersecurity solutions coming out of Europe and Japan.

The event will attract a diverse audience including government officials, cybersecurity experts, academia, and digital industry stakeholders. It promises to be an exceptional opportunity to build bridges between sectors, continents, and ideas. More than just an event, it reflects the shared commitment of Belgium, the EU, and Japan to forge a cyber-secure and future-proof digital ecosystem—together.

Trust, Resilience, and Shared Responsibility

Cybersecurity is no longer just a technical issue. It is a core pillar of national resilience, economic security, and democratic integrity. As Belgium and the EU push forward with transformative regulatory tools, their partnerships with like-minded countries such as Japan will be indispensable.

The evolving landscape, defined by the CRA, NIS2, and the Cybersecurity Act, represents both a challenge and an opportunity. By working together—through shared workshops, regulatory alignment, and mutual trust—Belgium and Japan can become standard-bearers for a global approach to cybersecurity that is effective, ethical, and future-ready.

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Another heat wave seems to be on its way, and Antwerp is already sweltering. On the newly reconstructed Vrijdagmarkt, I meet the ever-cordial Jonas Kellens in the cool interior of the wonderful Dim Dining. For me, it has been the mecca of fine dining for several years now, offering a strong Japanese influence combined with an exquisite selection of premium Japanese sake.

BELGIANS & JAPAN JONAS KELLENS

Master of Sake & Co-Owner of Dim Dining

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

Dirk: How and when did you end up at Dim Dining?

Jonas: Dim Dining has been around since 2016, though at the time it had a different chef and was less sophisticated. The business wasn't doing so well, so they asked me to elevate the concept, both financially and operationally. I first joined as an employee, and a year later I became co-owner.

Dirk: What training had you completed before joining Dim Dining?

Jonas: I've always been a chef, and after my studies at PIVA I worked at Het Zilte, among other places. I also worked once in the restaurant hall of a 3 Hats restaurant (the Australian equivalent of Michelin stars) in Australia, because I wanted to understand both sides of a restaurant. I knew I wanted my own business one day, where I could combine kitchen and front-of-house. As a result, I can actually do both, and I think that's one of the restaurant's strengths: if you work in the hall yourself, you have better knowledge and can respond more quickly to guests' questions.

Dirk: So you also worked in Australia?

Jonas: Yes, two years in Melbourne, in a

top restaurant on the 55th floor. There I worked in the high-luxury segment, with famous guests such as Roger Federer and Oprah Winfrey. It was very strict: we worked five days, ten hours a day, and in addition there was an optional study day every week. We had to attend at least two masterclasses a month, otherwise you couldn't keep working there. These could be about anything: cheese, knife sharpening, preparing fish.... And that's also where I first came into real contact with sake.

Dirk: How did that first encounter with sake go?

Jonas: At first I wasn't really into it, but after service we often went to a noodle bar that was open until four in the morning. One night I decided to try sake. The chef had several varieties and let me taste them. I was immediately hooked. Later, a masterclass at the restaurant itself followed, and then a whole new world opened up for me. I had been to Japan before, but I had never realized how big and diverse the world of sake really is.

Dirk: And when you came back to Belgium?

Jonas: They asked me here if I wanted to



do something with sake. At that time we only had one or two kinds in the restaurant, I think only from Konishi. I suggested working more with it. Three years later, we decided to do away with wine pairings altogether and focus only on sake. We created a sake menu and organized sake events. I believe in a kind of cycle: the more people drink sake, the more work there is for importers, and the more diversity I can offer in the restaurant.

Dirk: You also started studying sake after that?

Jonas: Yes, but not because I didn't know anything yet, rather because people sometimes didn't trust me. I was 25 when I started, and guests would ask, "How could you know that? How many times have you been to Japan?" I had no credibility. So I decided to take courses, exams, and earn certificates, so that I could confidently tell guests that I had studied it and learned from accredited educators. The certificates hanging here aren't so much for recognition, but to show guests that there is someone here who really knows about it.

Dirk: You really went all the way with those courses.

Jonas: True. Without the encouragement of my educators, I might never have become a Master of Sake. It's a tough education. Worldwide, there are only a handful of people with that level. I had to travel a lot, sometimes to Singapore, which meant closing the restaurant,

taking exams for three days, and then flying straight back to work here again.

Dirk: Was the Japanese language a problem?

Jonas: Definitely. My colleagues were almost all Japanese; they knew brewers personally and even which street or neighborhood a particular brewery was in. For me, it was pure study. I had to work harder to keep up. I don't speak Japanese, though I've learned to read a little through bottle labels, but I can't really communicate.

Dirk: You teach sake courses yourself now?

Jonas: Yes, through the SSA (Sake Sommelier Association). I also had contact with WSET, who are better known for their wine courses, but I chose to stay with SSA. In the Benelux we are three educators, and interest has grown tremendously: from 20 students in the first year to 350 now. And not just people from Michelin-starred restaurants, but also from brasseries and other catering businesses.

Dirk: That must take up a lot of time, in addition to running the restaurant?

Jonas: Absolutely. It always happens on my day off, usually on Sunday. On Saturday I work in the restaurant until late, then everything has to be cleaned and prepared for class: papers, tasting glasses, bottles... And I also organize the sake festival, which takes place the first weekend of October.



Dirk: You also go to Japan often?

Jonas: Three to four times a year, usually for sake- or restaurant-related purposes. Often alone, sometimes with a friend who takes pictures for our social media. In Japan I visit breweries and events, and sometimes I work in a sake brewery for a while.

Dirk: You offer sake pairings with the menu. Do you have any personal favorites?

Jonas: We have a wide spectrum of sake: from complex styles like Junmai or Kimoto, which I like to taste with more refined dishes where I need to concentrate, to light ginjos for drinking with friends. That's the beauty of it: sake, like beer or wine, has a wide range of flavors. Guests are often surprised by how good it tastes. But sake is actually a better option for pairing with fine dishes than wine, thanks to its lower acidity.





SAKE FESTIVAL



Kagami Biraki*

Dirk: How do guests react to sake pairings?

Jonas: Very positively. They like that they can ask anything, and we take the time to explain. In many restaurants, wine is briefly explained and that's it. With sake, you can tell a story and also play with the serving temperature, which is less common with wine.

Dirk: Dim Dining doesn't really profile itself as a Japanese restaurant, does it?

Jonas: Indeed, we don't claim to be a Japanese restaurant. We have many Japanese influences, umami, techniques, ingredients, but we are at most ten percent Japanese. It's our interpretation. I also think that's respectful towards Japanese cuisine. It's so specific, technical, pure craftsmanship. We're not Japanese, but we show respect and introduce guests to Japanese cuisine in our own way.

Dirk: Do you have many Japanese guests?

Jonas: On average six a week, so not that many. Japanese people also don't usually drink sake extensively with their meals. Sake pairings are really something we invented in the West. In Japan it's more common these days to drink beer or wine with meals.

Dirk: What struck me the first time I visited your restaurant - apart from the refined dishes and presentation - was the care you take to ensure hospitality.

Jonas: I think that's extremely important. When you choose to go to a fine restaurant, it should be a pleasant evening overall, one that makes you go home feeling good. Hospitality is an essential element of that experience. In the past, I sometimes saved up for a while to go to a nice restaurant, but if the food was great yet the service impersonal, it felt disappointing and often a reason not to return. That too is something somewhat Japanese: the hospitality and refined service.

Dirk: What are you most proud of?

Jonas: Two dreams I was able to realize: serving sake at the Gault&Millau gala dinner and at a Michelin event.

Dirk: Tell me a bit more about the sake festival you organize, which has grown quite a lot.

Jonas: Yes, it started in 2018 as a one-day event with 900 visitors. Last year it lasted two days. This year there will be several sake stands, food stands, masterclasses, a sake shop, music, demonstrations, and even a Kagami Biraki*. I do want to keep it small-scale though and Belgian, so that local importers re-

main the focus. No sponsorship deals or big international companies taking over. Not a big fair like the annual Salon du Sake in Paris, but a cozy event where people enjoy sake with music. Accessible to a wide audience, including passersby. An atmospheric opportunity to discover sake.

Dirk: Jonas, thank you for your time during this busy period. I'm already looking forward to the sake festival!

Jonas straightens up and prepares for the evening service. As I leave, he calls after me, "Be sure to drink a lot of sake!" I walk away from the lively Vrijdagmarkt full of terraces, already dreaming of a cool glass of daiginjo sake.

The sake festival in Antwerp will take place on 4 and 5 October. More info: sakefestival.be and dimdining.be.

* Kagami Biraki (鏡開き), meaning "mirror opening" or "breaking open the mirror," is a traditional Japanese ceremony, often associated with the opening of a sake barrel. The ceremony symbolizes new beginnings, breaking through barriers, and fostering unity. It is a celebratory event held on various occasions, including weddings, festivals, and business openings, marking significant transitions and bringing good fortune.

news from the members



EXCITING OPPORTUNITIES FOR 2026 - CELEBRATING 160 YEARS OF BELGIUM-JAPAN FRIENDSHIP

In 2026, we will proudly mark 160 years of diplomatic relations between Japan and Belgium - a remarkable milestone that celebrates not only historical ties but also a thriving partnership built on mutual respect, cultural exchange, and economic collaboration.

Following the great success of the 150th anniversary celebrations in 2016, which were supported by numerous esteemed sponsors including leading companies and cultural institutions from both nations, we aim to make the 160th anniversary in 2026 even more inspiring and memorable.

The events of 2016 demonstrated how powerful public-private partnerships can be in bringing people together and creating lasting impressions. We are still grateful for the 2016 Sponsors, such as AGC, ANA, Daikin, Hitachi, Mit-

subishi Motors, Subaru, Bridgestone, Honda, Kaneka, Komatsu, Kuraray, Mitsui, Nissan, Nitto, Sumitomo Mitsui Banking Corporation, Toyota, Aisin, AW Europe, Bekaert, Cartamundi, Denso, E & H De Beukelaer & Co., Janssen, JR-East, JTEKT, JTI, MUFG, Nippon Shokubai, NGK Ceramics Europe S.A., Panasonic, Solvay, Sumitomo Bakelite, Toyota Tsusho Europe, Umicore, Sumitomo Benelux, Terumo, Yakult, and more.

As we look ahead to 2026, the Embassy of Japan, BJA, Nihonjinkai, and the Honorary Consul General of Japan in Flanders, have once again joined forces to form a dedicated preparatory committee to create a vibrant program of events that will further strengthen the ties between our countries and deepen the bonds between our communities.

We warmly invite organizations, com-

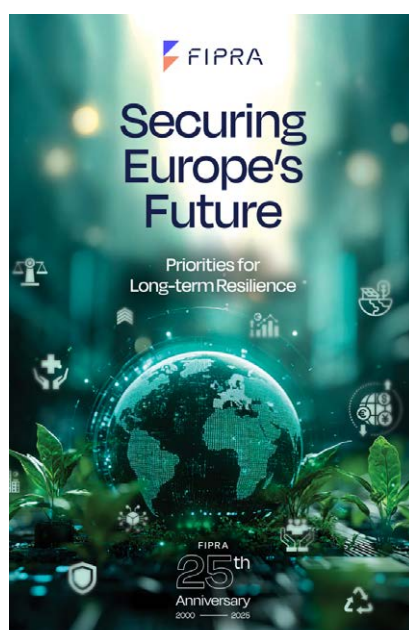
panies, and individuals to take part in this special year by becoming a General Sponsor of the 160th Anniversary celebrations. Your support will help us craft unforgettable experiences—ranging from cultural festivals and business forums to academic exchanges and artistic collaborations.

Let your name be part of this historic moment, building on the legacy of those who helped make the 150th anniversary a resounding success.

For more information on sponsorship opportunities and how you can be involved, please kindly contact the Embassy of Japan in Belgium at: 160anniversary@bx.mofa.go.jp

Together, let's make 2026 a shining celebration of friendship, unity, and shared future.

SECURING EUROPE'S FUTURE: PRIORITIES FOR LONG-TERM RESILIENCE



A new landmark report by Brussels public affairs agency FIPRA, *Securing Europe's Future: Priorities for Long-term Resilience*, identifies policy priorities to help support Europe's long-term resilience.

The report examines some of the most pressing challenges, risks, and opportunities that may confront Europe in the years ahead and identifies policy responses to strengthen Europe's readiness.

With a foreword by Herman Van Rompuy, former President of the European Council, political and policy insights from FIPRA's Global Network and multi-sectoral policy experts, and interviews with partners in key industries, the

report is divided into two chapters: I. Geopolitical Resilience – Trade, Security and Wider Europe; and II. A Resilient Economic, Social and Climate Model.

Foresight and future-orientedness is central to building resilience – defined in the report as the ability of governments, economies, and societies to withstand major disruptions and transformations. Given the multi-faceted challenges Europe faces, resilience will be a key dimension of Europe's success in the decades to come.

- › Read the Executive Summary [here](#)
- › Read the Full Report [here](#)
- › Learn more about [FIPRA](#) and its global network of 50+ countries

news from the members

2025 SPRING CONFERMENT OF DECORATIONS

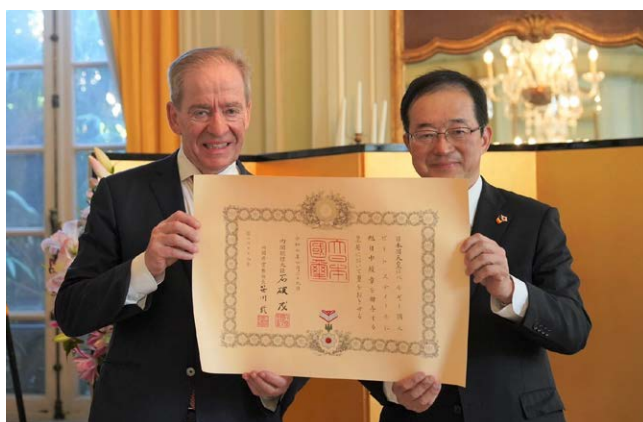
On 29 April 2025, the Government of Japan announced 2025 Spring Conferment of Decorations on Foreign Nationals.

From the Kingdom of Belgium, His Excellency Mr Piet Steel, Honorary Consul-

General of Japan in Flanders received the Order of the Rising Sun, Gold Rays with Neck Ribbon for his contribution to promoting exchanges and friendship between Japan and Belgium.

The BJA would like to sincerely congrat-

ulate HE Mr Steel on receiving this honorable distinction, which is a wonderful recognition of his exceptional merits and dedication to promoting relations between Japan and Belgium – a contribution to international cooperation over so many decades.



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Navigating an evolving trade landscape amid rising geopolitical tensions

By Daan De Vlieger, Partner, Deloitte Belgium, Frauke De Temmerman, Director, Deloitte Belgium, Tomofumi Matsui, Senior Manager, Deloitte Belgium, Lukas Weemaes, Senior, Deloitte Belgium and Virginie De Brabandt, Director, Deloitte Belgium and BJA Editorial Committee Member

There are numerous areas that hold potential for tariff mitigation, which should not be considered solely from a customs perspective, as is often the case, but also from other business angles such as legal, tax, supply chain, logistics, procurement and sales. A combination of these cross-functional insights could significantly reduce the financial and logistical impact of the current volatile regulatory landscape.

Tariffs, in various shapes, have been in existence for as long as people are engaging in international trade; and are likely to remain for the foreseeable future. In today's world, ongoing geopolitical shifts have brought tariffs to the top of the agenda. The latest tariffs imposed by US policy makers add a new layer of uncertainty to this by itself already complex subject, highlighting the need for a multi-disciplinary strategy to address the changing trade landscape.

Current situation

While the latest wave of tariffs appears to focus on the US targeting products originating elsewhere in the world, significant efforts by the EU to protect domestic industries through the use of trade defense measures shouldn't go unnoticed either. The EU continues to launch anti-dumping and anti-subsidy

investigations in response to ongoing trade disputes.

Why it matters

Complexity of tariffs

Navigating the wide array of tariffs presents significant challenges for businesses, as it involves more than merely paying import duties. Several factors, such as classification codes, (non-)preferential country of origin of both finished products and their components, customs value, and even steel and aluminium content have to co-determine the applicability and impact of tariffs. Additionally, some tariffs are cumulative, while others are not. With all these complexities at play, it is imperative to correctly understand the scope of each tariff measure to ensure trade compliance and keep costs under control.

Financial impact

The financial impact of these measures can be direct and quantifiable. Yet at times, costs appear more concealed, as they are absorbed in logistics, administrative expenses or costs of goods sold. As escalating tariff costs are less apparent due to their integration into other expenses, they are not always seen as a factor that can potentially be mitigated.

Examples of tariff mitigation measures

There are actually numerous areas that demonstrate potential for tariff mitigation. Prominent examples of immediate tariff mitigation actions include a change in transfer price, application of the first sale for export principle as well as price unbundling.

Change in Transfer Price

Whilst certain companies started changing their transfer price strategies in an attempt to lower the customs value, it needs to be noted that customs authorities do not always accept ‘arm’s length’ transfer prices for customs purposes. A specific assessment under the customs regulations is required to demonstrate the arm’s length nature from a customs perspective. It can even be the case that the transfer price applied is higher than what the customs value should be.

Additionally, if a periodical transfer price adjustment is required, it needs to be assessed whether it has affected the customs value previously declared and what additional customs filings are required to pay additional duties or claim duty refund.

First Sale for Export (in the US)

The ‘first sale for export’ concept remains in existence for US imports, while the EU has, at least in theory, shifted to the ‘last sale for export’ principle when it implemented the Union Customs Code in 2016. When multiple transactions exist before import into the US, under certain conditions the first sale in the chain, whose value is

typically lower than that of the subsequent sales, can be used as the basis for the customs value at import. Depending on the transactional set-up, this scheme has the potential of significantly lowering the customs value and, accordingly, the import duty amount.

Unbundling of sales price

Some costs, when embedded in the price at which the sale of goods is invoiced, can be excluded from the customs value, while others cannot. Unbundling cost components and assessing the duty of each component is another method for tariff mitigation.

Structural approach to manage tariffs

Especially under the current trade landscape, a structured approach to tariff mitigation is required. Such can be broken down in six sequential steps.

› *Step 1: Task Force*

Establishing and activating a cross-functional task force comprising, for example, legal, tax, supply chain, logistics, procurement and sales is the key to tackle any challenges without negative collateral damage in other areas of business.

› *Step 2: Data intelligence*

Ensuring the availability of master data and transactional data, is the key to assess the impact of additional duties and to contemplate the tariff mitigation measures efficiently and effectively.

› *Step 3: Scenario modelling*

Defining distinct scenarios based on unrelated uncertainties (e.g. the degree of global demand and the degree of trade liberalization) allows informed discussion of tariff mitigation measures. The aim is to identify ‘no-regret actions’, which are essentially resilient easily reversible tariff mitigation measures, involving low effort and cost, that can work under any of the four scenarios defined.

› *Step 4: Strategy definition*

Defining the strategy and a concrete action plan are next. These actions range from immediate and short-term actions (i.e. quick wins) over mid-to-long-term initiatives, depending on the tariff mitigating impact and the level of effort required.

› *Step 5: Strategy execution*

Executing the defined action plan while maintaining overall agility and open lines of communication throughout the process ensures efficient and effective implementation.

› *Step 6: Strategy monitoring*

Monitoring the actual financial and operational impact of the executed actions and regulatory developments allows to adjust the strategy and action plan where necessary.

Why act now?

The current volatile trade environment necessitates a proactive strategy for addressing the issue of tariffs. Tariffs will continue to affect the financial and logistical operations of businesses. On the upside, their impact can be mitigated through a planned and cross-functional approach. The latest tariff developments present opportunities in the sense that they necessitate companies to reassess their global trade strategies. Agile and conscious businesses will gain a first mover advantage in the global market.



FOLON AND JAPAN, A LONG HISTORY OF FRIENDSHIP AND FRUITFUL COLLABORATION

The Belgian artist Jean-Michel Folon's relationship with Japan began in the early 1960s. The first exhibition of his work was organised in Tokyo in 1970, with support from Olivetti and a press group. Along with his wife, the artist Colette Portal, Folon discovered Japan for the first time. He was deeply moved by the country's culture, crafts and customs. The gentleness of the landscape, the harmony of the gardens and the elegance of the traditional houses made a profound impression on him and fired his imagination. The sense of awe was mutual. In 1985, the same press group suggested staging a major exhibition. Further collaborations followed during the 1990s, along with a series of exhibitions in 1995 in Tokyo, Kyoto, Osaka.

In 2024-2025, 30 years after his last exhibition, a unique and unprecedented retrospective has been staged in Japan thanks to the enthusiasm of the Chunichi Shimbun newspaper and partner museums - the Tokyo Station Gallery, the Nagoya City Art Museum and the Abeno Harukas Art Museum in Osaka. The exhibition showcased the diversity and coherence of the work of an inquisitive and multidisciplinary artist who, in defiance of the artistic diktats of the time, blurred the boundaries between genres and succeeded in establishing a unique universe, in a variety of techniques.

An imperial visit

In September 2024, the Tokyo Station

Gallery had the honor of welcoming His Majesty the Emperor of Japan, accompanied by the Empress and Her Imperial Highness Princess Aiko for a private tour of the exhibition "Folon. Agency of imaginary journeys" in the heart of Tokyo. They enjoyed a tour of more than 230 drawings, watercolour paintings, etchings, posters and sculptures of the Belgian artist.

Who was Jean-Michel Folon (1934 -2005)

Jean-Michel FOLON (1934-2005) left his mark on the collective imagination of the last third of the 20th century, through his posters, illustrations, television animations and numerous exhibitions. A humanist, his work is figurative and poetic, rooted in traditional techniques and, as such, atypical in an artistic panorama dominated by conceptual art. His universe evolved, in line with the artist's major struggles in favour of human rights and environmental awareness, towards a calmer mood from the 1980s onwards. In 2000, he created the Folon Foundation in the Parc Solvay in La Hulpe, a museum that brings together his work.

La Fondation Folon in La Hulpe, more than a museum

Jean-Michel Folon had the idea of creating a foundation that would bring together in one place the works he has kept throughout his career. Although Italy and France offered him remark-

able locations, Folon fell under the spell of the Walloon Region's proposal to set up his Foundation on the edge of the Forêt de Soignes, in the Solvay regional estate, 20 minutes from Brussels. The 227-hectare park enchanted the artist, a great defender of nature.

The Folon Foundation opened to the public in October 2000. The staging imagined by the artist is intended to be a total work of art, an immersion in the artist's mind. Folon has imagined an immersive, poetic museum. He uses sound and movement. Perspective effects, mirror effects, music and films punctuate the visit. In 2007, temporary exhibition spaces were added.

The exhibitions showcase other areas of Folon's work or present the work of close artist friends, those whom Folon described as his 'family of minds'. They also showcase artists that share with Jean-Michel Folon a common artistic sensibility, imbued with poetry, respect for the environment and a particular vision of the world.

In 2026, two exhibitions dedicated to major Japanese artists: Kengo Kuma & Jirō Taniguchi.

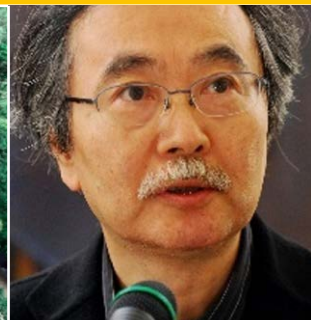
In 2026, Belgium and Japan will celebrate 160 years of Diplomatic friendship. After the Folon Foundation was warmly welcomed in Japan in 2024-2025 with a major retrospective exhibition, it is now the Foundation's turn to honour the Land of the Rising Sun. Two



© Chunichi Shimbun Co., Ltd.



The Folon Foundation



Jirō Taniguchi

exceptional exhibitions will be presented, dedicated to two internationally acclaimed Japanese artists: KENGO KUMA and JIRŌ TANIGUCHI.

In spring 2026, organized in close collaboration with Kengo Kuma and Associates, the exhibition at the Folon Foundation will feature around thirty models and sixty photographs. This selection of projects from around the world will offer an insight into architecture that aspires to connect people, nature and sustainable materials using the most advanced studies and technologies.

Light, connection with nature, transparency, softness and sustainability - these are the predominant themes in Kengo Kuma's work, that echo the characteristics and aspirations of Jean-Michel Folon, who encouraged us to see the beauty of the world and protect its nature.

Kengo Kuma's relentless pursuit of harmonious integration of the built environment with its natural surroundings gives us an architecture that is at once poetic and philosophical.

An exhibition entirely dedicated to the famous mangaka Jirō TANIGUCHI (Totori 1947 - Tokyo 2017) will take place on the second part of the year. On the fringes of comics and manga, Taniguchi is the author of dozens of albums, including the famous "A distant neighborhood", which won the best script

prize at the Angoulême festival in 2003. Organised in close collaboration with the Furari Foundation in Tokyo, Casterman publishers and the French copyright office in Tokyo, this completely new exhibition will showcase the full diversity of Jirō Taniguchi's work whose poetic universe and humanistic drawings delicately celebrate the beauty and complexity of the world.

These two exhibitions go beyond the simple artistic framework and strengthen the ties that unite our two countries. They are part of a sustainable approach that we hope will attract the attention of a large public. The Foundation is currently looking for sponsorship and would be delighted to answer any questions. If you want to take part in the adventure and support



© Colette Portal, 1970
Archives of the Fondation Folon

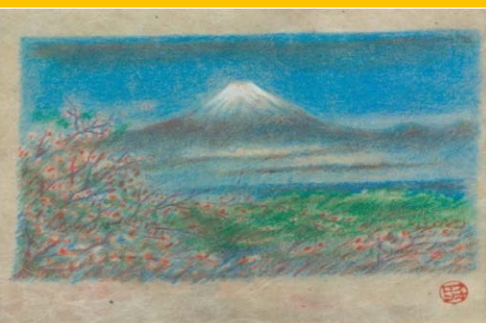
one of these two projects, do not hesitate to contact Stéphanie Angelroth, Director or Pauline Loumaye in charge of the exhibitions.



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Folon Sketchbook, 1995
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Kengo Kuma
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Kengo Kuma's architecture

PERSONALIA

BJA OFFICE RELOCATION NEW ADDRESS

After several decades at Avenue Louise 287, the BJA is pleased to inform you that we have moved to a new office location:

Wolvengracht 38 Rue du Fossé aux Loups, box 4 - 1000 Brussels

Please note that our phone number, email addresses, and all other legal details remain unchanged. We kindly ask you to update your records and address book accordingly. We look forward to welcoming you to our new premises.

The BJA would like to extend a warm welcome to its newest members:

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Vandemoortele is a leading European food group specialized in frozen bakery products and plant-based food solutions. With a proud heritage spanning over a century, we operate in more than 70 countries and run over 30 production plants worldwide.

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food and our ability to adapt to diverse tastes and market demands.

We see strong synergy between Belgian, European, and Japanese values, particularly in craftsmanship, food culture, and long-term thinking. By joining the BJA, we aim to strengthen our ties in the region and contribute to fostering meaningful cultural and commercial exchanges.

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Our BELUX team—based in Brussels—specialises in guiding international companies, employees, and their families through every step of the relocation journey, ensuring compliance, comfort, and a smooth transition.

We are proud of our longstanding business relations with Japanese companies and have successfully helped many assignees settle in Belgium. With the solid base and experience of a large firm and the flexibility and commitment of a small one, we aim to support BJA members in navigating European mobility challenges and enhancing their international talent strategies.

Expat Management Group は、法務およびリロケーションの専門業者として認可を受け、ベルギー、ルクセンブルク、オランダに事務所を構え、精力的に活動を続けております。



人事派遣や企業組織の海外移転に関連する広範なリロケーションサービス全般、および駐在員の方々とそのご家族の現地生活に必要な各種手続きを、簡便かつ円滑に代行しております。

ブリュッセルに拠点を置く BELUX チームは、国際企業および機関に従事する皆様とご家族に応じたリロケーション手配の各ステップをサポートし、コンプライアンスに則った快適かつ円滑な移転手続きの補助を通じて、ご要望にお応えできるよう尽力しております。

弊社は、長年にわたり邦人企業とのビジネスを通じて築いてきた信頼関係を誇りとし、ベルギーに駐在される方々のサポート機関として、質の高いサービスを提供してまいりました。強固な基盤と豊富な経験をもとに、大企業に限らずあらゆる規模の企業に柔軟に対応するサポート機関として、BJA 会員の皆様に支援し、皆様のヨーロッパにおける国際的な活動が、より高度なチャレンジに満ちたものとなるよう努めております。



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GAUTAM DIAMONDS

Gautam Diamonds is a family-owned diamond jewelry house with over 40 years of history, based in the heart of Brussels at Grand Place, with additional boutiques in Galerie de la Reine and Brussels Airport. We offer high-quality diamonds sourced directly from Antwerp and attentive customer service, including assistance in Japanese. This has earned us the trust of clients from Japan and around the world. To celebrate our 40th anniversary this year, we are running a special campaign offering up to 50% off.

With the hope of contributing to cultural and economic ex-

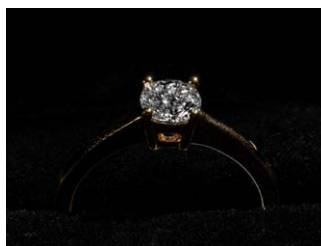
change between Belgium and Japan, we have joined the BJA. Through our jewelry, we aim to add beauty to life's special moments and build deeper connections with our customers. We also have a sister store in Kyoto, enabling us to provide aftercare services within Japan. We look forward to contributing to the BJA's wonderful network.

Gautam Diamonds (ゴータム・ダイヤモンド) は、ブリュッセル中心部グランプラス本店のほか、ギャルリー・ド・ラ・レーヌ店とブリュッセル空港にも店舗を構える創業 40 年のダイヤモンドジュエリー専門店です。



アントワープから直接仕入れた高品質なダイヤモンドと、日本語対応を含む丁寧な接客で、日本をはじめ世界中のお客様に信頼されるサービスを提供しています。今年は、創業 40 周年に伴い 50%OFF キャンペーンを実施中です。

ベルギーと日本の文化・経済交流の一助となることを願い、BJA に加入いたしました。ジュエリーを通じて人生の特別な瞬間を彩り、より深いご縁を築いてまいります。



京都にも姉妹店を構え、日本国内でのアフターケアも対応可能です。BJA の素晴らしいネットワークに貢献できることを楽しみにしております。

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