

“EU-Japan Conference on Smart Society and beyond for the Super-Aging Era” (8 Oct 2018)

Organised by Waseda University, jointly with the Université Libre de Bruxelles (ULB)

Opening Address by Ambassador Kazuo Kodama,
Ambassador of Japan to the European Union

**Prof. Shuji Hashimoto, Senior Executive Vice President,
Waseda University**

Prof. Judith le Maire, Vice Rector, ULB

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good Morning to you all,

Thank you very much for the invitation to this “EU-Japan Conference on Smart Society and beyond for the Super-Aging Era”. I am honored and delighted to be given an opportunity to speak to you at this opening session.

(Japan and the EU united as strategic partners based on our shared values)

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Japan and the EU are united as strategic partners based on our shared values of democracy and the rule of law, as well as by our determination to promote together an open and fair global economy. These shared values constitute the foundation of our political and economic strategic partnership for peace, prosperity and a rules-based international order.

From this strategic perspective, I am very pleased to inform you that the Economic Partnership Agreement and the

Strategic Partnership Agreement, signed by our leaders on 17 July this year, will truly mark the beginning of a new chapter in the partnership between Japan and the EU. The EPA will create the world's largest free trading area covering 640 million people and 27.8% of global GDP. The SPA will provide a legal basis to anchor cooperation in a wide range of areas between Japan and the EU as well as its Member States. The European Parliament has started its ratification procedures for the EPA and held its first discussions on 27 September. We are expecting both the EPA and SPA to enter into force as soon as possible so that all of our citizens in the EU and Japan can benefit from the wide-ranging outcomes of these epoch-making agreements.

(Cooperation in the areas of education, youth, sports and culture between Japan and the EU)

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The SPA stipulates that Japan, the EU and its Member States will cooperate and coordinate in the area of education, youth, sport and culture, based on the principles of mutual respect, equal partnership and respect for international law.

Inspired by the negotiations and the conclusion of the SPA, Japan's Education Minister Mr. Hayashi and European Commissioner for Education Mr. Navracsics met in Budapest to officially launch the Japan-EU Policy dialogue on Education, Culture and Sport.

At the meeting, they confirmed the importance of promoting international cooperation in higher education and agreed to launch a new Japan-EU joint initiative, namely, a joint funding program to develop highly integrated master

programs and provide scholarships for talented students from Europe and Japan to study abroad.

The joint call is now being published in the framework of the EU Erasmus Joint Master Degree action and the Japan Inter-University Exchange Project. Your applications are highly encouraged and welcome.

It is our shared belief that through such programs the intellectual exchanges between our universities will enrich the people to people ties between Japan and Europe.

(Future of Robotics and AI in the Super-Aging Era)

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The main theme of this conference is “Smart Society and beyond for the Super-Aging Era”. More specifically, the conference is expected to focus on the role of robotics and AI in the super-aging era.

In order to impress upon you the sheer magnitude of the super-aging era in Japan, the following forecast is particularly noteworthy:

In 2016, the population of Japan was 126.9 million, of which the percentage of people aged 65 or above was 27.3%. Japan’s population in 2065 (50 years from now) is expected to decrease to 88million and the percentage of elderly people will rise to 38.43%. This means that four out of ten Japanese people will be 65 years old or above. Arguably, one of the biggest challenges for Japan will be how to ensure Japanese society remains sustainable not only environmentally, but also socially and economically in the face of the prospective decline in its working age population

(15 to 65 years).

Robotics and AI are a double-edged sword in terms of their impact on changing people's jobs and lives. On one hand, some jobs may become entirely redundant, causing mass technological unemployment. On the other hand, robotics and AI free up workers to do more productive, less routine tasks and provide consumers with access to more and better products and services. We should realize that the extent of automation will depend on policy, institutions and social preferences.

In a nutshell, Japan has no time to lose to prepare for the arrival of an era of robotics and AI to offset the decrease in the working age population as well as to provide care and assistance to the growing elderly population.

Bearing these challenges in mind, the Japanese government has launched its vision for the future entitled "Society 5.0". Why five, you may ask? Our ancestors originally lived in hunter-gatherer societies, which then evolved into agrarian societies, then from the 18th century into industrial societies; and in the latter part of 20th century, we entered into the information society. In this century, we are now transitioning into "Society 5.0" which will be knowledge and IT-based as well as built on a system in which cyberspace and physical space are highly integrated. In "Society 5.0", robotics and AI are expected to play a key role. In Japan, government, business and academic communities are actively engaged in achieving this vision through promising innovative investment projects in robotics and AI.

Here in Europe, the European Commission has proposed "Horizon Europe" (the succession program to "Horizon 2020) as the next research and innovation framework program

starting in 2021 with a budget of 100 billion Euro. Robotics and AI will be one of the key policy areas in “Horizon Europe”.

I am sure we will be able to find ample room for advanced collaboration at the level of joint projects between “Society 5.0” and “Horizon Europe”. In this respect, let me express my hope that today’s discussion will produce new ideas and tentative discussions towards such collaboration between Japan and the EU.

(Closing)

Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me conclude by wishing this conference every success in achieving a closer research partnership between Europe and Japan.

Thank you very much for your attention.