

The 9th Kobe University Brussels European Centre Symposium
“Smart Cities, Secure Societies: Breakthroughs in EU and Japan
Research Cooperation”

Organised jointly with the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB)
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Opening Address by Ambassador Kazuo Kodama
Ambassador of Japan to the European Union

Prof. Hiroshi Takeda, President of Kobe University,
Prof. Dr. Romain Meeusen, Vice-Rector of VUB,
Mr. Patrick Child, Deputy Director-General, DG RTD, European
Commission,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Good Morning to you all,

I am delighted to be given an opportunity to speak to you at this
opening session.

(Introduction)

Kobe University hosted its very first symposium in Brussels in
2011, focusing on Japan- EU education policy. Today's symposium
is the second of its kind being co-hosted by Kobe University and
the VUB. I salute both universities for continuing their academic
collaboration in such a steadfast and enduring manner.

(Ideological mega-trend: liberal democracy)

Today, I would like to present to you my thoughts on “ideological mega-trends” as the backdrop against which today’s intellectual exchanges take place. My having served as a professional diplomat for more than 42 years leads me to strongly believe that the ideas of human equality and freedom have been growing inexorably over the past few centuries. Since the end of WWII in particular, this mega-trend has been firmly embodied in a political system of “liberal democracy”. Japan and the EU are united in our shared commitment to liberal democracy, which is the foundation of our political and economic strategic partnership for peace, prosperity and a rules-based international order.

(Challenges posed within our own democracies)

Yet, liberal democracy is now confronted by the challenges from within.

To put it simply, Europe is struggling against a populist backlash to liberal democracy which has traditionally extolled the values of diversity in sexual orientation, religion, and ethnicity as well as encouraging free competition and equality of opportunity for all. The political parties of the center seem to have lost ground to both far left and far right parties, which together preach anti-EU, anti-immigration, and anti-globalization rhetoric. In a nutshell, values based on “illiberal democracy”.

(What should we do?)

To these challenges, what should we do? My answer is to set our eyes firmly on the lodestar. I say that this lodestar is to do more to improve the quality of our liberal democracies.

You may reply: “Yes, but what if the voters continue to support politicians who never cease to show contempt for the values of liberal democracy?”

One way forward is to respond to the concerns of the economically left-behind in our democracies in a way that goes beyond “throwing money at the problem.” The global recovery is not reaching the poorest in our societies. It is true that free and open trade has lifted billions across the globe out of poverty, yet we must acknowledge that globalization produces losers as well as winners.

Throughout my days at the UN and at the OECD, I have come to be convinced that the concept of “human security” can augment our liberal democracy to meaningfully enrich our conventional ideas of equal opportunity. In essence, “human security” means “the protection and empowerment of an individual as “an agent” whose lifetime career trajectory is full of potential at the beginning. I do believe that the concept of “empowerment” could be a useful policy tool in ensuring freedom, equality and the dignity of humanity in the liberal democratic system.

(A new Japan-EU joint initiative in academic exchanges)

Before I conclude, let me say a few words about 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.

(Closing)

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am impressed by the rich selection of timely and interesting topics on the agenda today, covering subjects such as “Research and Innovation for Secure Societies”, “Smart Cities, Smart Societies” and “Between Orient & Occident: Cultural Memory & Cultural Transfer” to name a few. I can foresee a wonderful inter-disciplinary dialogue among today’s participants. Let me conclude by wishing *the 9th Kobe University Brussels European Centre Symposium* every success in achieving closer academic partnerships and cooperation between Europe and Japan.

Thank you for your attention.