

Welcoming Remarks by Ambassador Kazuo Kodama

At the 2019 New Year Reception

On January 16, 2019 at the Mission of Japan to the European Union, Brussels

Excellencies,

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good evening. I would like to wish you all a very happy New Year.

Thank you very much for attending our reception.

(Japan-EU relations)

Last year saw remarkable progress in the Japan-EU relationship. By mid-December, both the Japanese and European Parliaments approved and/or gave its consent to the two historic agreements: the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) and the Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA) to be concluded between Japan and the European Union.

(Note) The European Parliament gave its consent to both the Japan-EU EPA & the Japan-EU SPA to be concluded btw Japan & the EU.

The outcomes of the votes are;

- (1) 71% (474 out of 661) of MEPs voted in favor of EPA.
- (2) 81% (547 out of 673) of MEPs voted in favor of SPA.

Then on 21 December, 2018, Japan and the European Union confirmed through exchanges of notes that their internal procedures for the entry into force of the EPA had been completed.

Also on the same day in Brussels, the government of Japan notified the European Union of Japan's completion of the ratification of the SPA. While the conclusions by the EU and its Member States are required for the entry into force of the SPA, Japan and the EU shall apply some provisions of the Agreement pending its entry into force.

In a nutshell, the Japan-EU EPA will enter into force on February 1st and with respect to the SPA, the application of some provisions of the Agreement will commence on February 1st, 2019.

This is the reason why the year 2019 will mark the beginning of a new era in the history of the Japan-EU relationship, elevating our relationship onto a higher terrain.

The Japan-EU EPA will create a huge free trade area of 640 million people which produces approximately 30 percent of world GDP.

With the entry into force of the EPA, Japan and the EU are sending a powerful message both to promote free, fair and rules-based trade, and against protectionism. The EPA demonstrates to the world the firm political will of Japan and the EU to keep the flag of free trade waving high and to powerfully advance free trade. The Agreement will also deliver sustainable and inclusive economic growth and will spur job creation.

The entry into force of the SPA will set the stage for even stronger collaboration both bilaterally and multilaterally between Japan and the EU, which share common values and principles, such as democracy, the rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms.

I would like to take this opportunity to express, on behalf of the

government of Japan, my heartfelt appreciation to all those leaders and officials on the EU side including the Commission, the European Council, the European Parliament and the EU Member States for making tireless contributions to conclude the EPA and the SPA over the last five years since the inception of the negotiations. Allow me to mention that without the political leadership of our leaders, namely, Prime Minister Abe of Japan, President Tusk of the European Council and President Juncker of the European Commission, the EPA would not have been possible. I am truly grateful for their steadfast and enduring leadership in navigating us all to this final destination.

(A beginning of the post-Heisei era in Japan)

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Before I conclude, let me say a few words about the beginning of the post-Heisei era in Japan.

His Majesty the Emperor will abdicate on April 30, 2019. On the following day of May 1, His Imperial Highness the Crown Prince will ascend to the throne, becoming the new Emperor and marking the start of a new era.

In order to officially propagate and celebrate the Enthronement of His Majesty the Emperor, the Enthronement Ceremony of His Majesty the Emperor will be held on October 22, 2019 to which representatives of foreign countries including the EU will be invited.

I wish to take this opportunity to express my deepest gratitude to their Majesties, the Emperor and the Empress, for their selfless and tireless efforts to discharge their roles as the symbol of the State and of the unity of the People during the thirty one year-long Heisei era.

May I humbly wish Their Majesties continued good health and happiness and Their Imperial Highnesses the Crown Prince and Crown Princess every success, good health and much happiness in their ushering in a new era as the Emperor and the Empress.

(Conclusion)

Ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you again for coming to our reception this evening.

We have prepared plenty of food for you, including sushi, some traditional festive food for the New Year and Japanese sake.

2019 is going to be a truly win-win year for Japan-EU relations. Nowhere will it be so visibly felt as the food sector, where consumers in the EU will have much improved access to Japanese quality foods including wagyu beef and Sake spirits to name a few, just as consumers in Japan will enjoy less expensive but high quality wine and cheese from the EU.

Let me wish you all again a happy and prosperous year 2019.

Please enjoy the reception.

Thank you for your attention.

(End)