

The 12th Kobe University Brussels European Centre Symposium
“Blue Economy, Green Horizons: EU-Japan Research for Healthy, Sustainable Seas
and Oceans” (18 October 2022)

Opening Remarks

MASAKI, Yasushi

Ambassador of Japan to the European Union

**Prof. Masato FUJISAWA, President of Kobe University,
Prof. Jan Danckaert, Rector of Vrije Universiteit Brussel,
Ms. Signe RATSO, Director-General, DG for Research and Innovation,
Distinguished Speakers and Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Good morning,**

[Opening]

**I am extremely delighted to have been invited here to speak once
again this year.**

**I would like to express my sincere appreciation to all those who
have been involved in the organisation of this symposium.**

**Before delivering my opening remarks, I would first like to say our
position about the war in Ukraine. More than a half year has passed
since Russia’s aggression against Ukraine began. Japan as well as
international partners including the EU and the G7 countries cannot
condone unilateral changes to the status quo by force by Russia. Its
most recent missile attacks against civilian infrastructure and cities
across Ukraine has led to the death of innocent civilians. We
condemn these attacks in the strongest possible terms and recall
that indiscriminate attacks on innocent civilian populations
constitute a war crime. Peace must be restored to Ukraine as soon
as possible. Japan is therefore united with the EU and all our
partners. Japan stands with the people of Ukraine.**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today, I would like to take this opportunity to express my views on three points: 1) the relationship between Japan and seas and oceans which is the main topic of today's symposium; 2) Japan-EU cooperation for healthy and sustainable seas and oceans; 3) importance of the academic exchange between Japan and the EU, and appreciation for Kobe University's activities in Europe.

[1. Japan's Relationship with the Oceans and Seas]

First and foremost, it is important to consider the surroundings around each country. Japan is a maritime nation surrounded by seas and oceans and consisting of nearly 7,000 islands. Although Japan's land area is slightly smaller than that of Sweden and Norway, its total territory including territorial waters and exclusive economic zones is approximately 4.47 million square kilometres, making it the sixth largest in the world. Since ancient times, the surrounding seas and oceans have had an important influence on the lives of the Japanese in so many ways. In fact, as an example everyone knows in the past and even today, seafood, including sushi and sashimi, is deeply rooted in Japanese cuisine. In addition, currently, 99% of Japan's trade volume is via sea.

Against this backdrop, the Japanese government places great importance on building sustainable ocean governance. As part of the detailed ocean policy of Japan, we are working on ensuring a range of important initiatives and policies. Among them are the promotion of marine industries, the maintenance and protection of the marine environment, the improvement of scientific knowledge, promotion of Arctic policy, international cooperation and human resource development as well as ensuring comprehensive maritime security.

Unfortunately, the maritime security situation has become increasingly severe in recent years, including in the waters

surrounding Japan. I would like to emphasize that a “Free and Open Indo-Pacific” is a vision that Japan has proposed for the purpose of promoting and maintaining peace and stability in the international community, and that many international partners, including the EU, understand its importance and share its goals.

[2. Importance of Japan-EU Cooperation]

Secondly, both Japan and the EU recognise that the stability of the seas and oceans is extremely important as part of securing the global commons, and in light of the current international situation, we have deepened our cooperation in recent years. Last September, the EU released the joint communication on its strategy for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific. Japan strongly welcomes the fact that the EU shares fundamental values such as freedom, democracy, and the rule of law, and that it has expressed its willingness to strengthen its engagements in the Indo-Pacific.

We look forward to Japan and the EU advancing concrete cooperation across broad areas including in the field of maritime research.

[3. Importance of Academic Exchanges between Japan and the EU and Appreciation for Kobe University’s activity]

Finally, I would like to once again express my appreciation to Kobe University for their efforts in organising this interdisciplinary symposium on a topic of such great interest and importance to both Japanese and European stakeholders. Kobe University established its Brussels Centre in 2010 to strengthen education and research cooperation between Japan and Europe. I would like to congratulate the Kobe University Brussels Centre on the 12th symposium. I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to President Professor Fujisawa for his leadership as well as the endeavours of the Director Professor Yoshida, and I am confident that Kobe University's

activities in Brussels will continue to serve as a cornerstone for Japan-EU cooperation in the future.

[Closing]

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to close my remarks by expressing my hope that today's symposium on “EU-Japan Research for Healthy, Sustainable Seas and Oceans” will further advance academic, scientific exchanges between Japan and Europe.

Thank you very much for your kind attention.

(End)