

A big round of applause for those musicians active in Belgium and France. What a fantastic way to start the evening!

We will also have exciting martial arts demonstrations: Kendo by Wakakoma Kenshikai and Naginata by the Forêt de Soignes Naginata Club both in Brussels immediately after this.

In addition, a little later, the Mission's chef, Mr. Arima, together with Mr. Ishii, the chef from the Embassy of Japan in Belgium, will demonstrate the art of sushi-making before our eyes.

So please enjoy the evening while it lasts, particularly while the sushi lasts.

And I am afraid to say that this is not the end of my speech, so bear with me for a few minutes.

Dear friends and colleagues,

It is a real pleasure to welcome you all to our annual garden reception.

This event is always an opportunity for us to celebrate Japan-EU relations and say thank you to each and every one of you— for your friendship, for your partnership, and for the support you have shown to all of us at the Mission of Japan to the European Union.

In these uncertain times, Japan and the EU stand as genuine partners — and, I would say, true friends — grounded in shared values, including our commitment to a rules-based international order. Our security is closely linked between the

Indo-Pacific and Europe, and that's both ways. We are drawing on each other's experience and leveraging our respective strengths to navigate increasingly uncertain global waters.

From defense and security, cyber and space, and maritime security, to hydrogen and other clean technologies, AI, quantum, and resilient supply chains for critical materials, Japan and the EU are working closely together — at both governmental and non-governmental levels, including, of course, businesses and academia.

One of the most recent achievements in our relationship is Japan's association with Horizon Europe. This opens up tremendous opportunities for Japanese and European researchers, universities, start-ups, and companies to work together and create new technologies and new solutions for the future.

There is, of course, still work to be done.

One area where we need continued open and constructive consultation is the EU's recent proposed Industrial Accelerator Act — IAA —.

We fully understand the urgent need to strengthen European industrial competitiveness and to reduce strategic vulnerabilities. Japan is doing just that.

But some provisions in their current form, could have unprecedented consequences for Japan, admittedly unintended.

Japanese automobile companies, for example, have long invested heavily in Europe, conducting R&D, working with European suppliers, and creating tens of thousands of jobs.

In other words, they are part of Europe's industrial ecosystem. And I strongly believe that Europe's industrial resilience will be stronger when it is built together with trusted partners like Japan.

I very much hope that we will be able to find a solution through continued dialogue, as we have done on so many occasions in the past. Because, ultimately, Japan and the EU are stronger together in today's world.

Friends,
Brussels can sometimes be a complicated place, particularly for those of us from outside the EU. But when I look back on my time here over the past 3 years, it is not the institutions themselves - certainly not the regulations or directives - that I will remember the most.

It is the people.

Getting to know so many of you — whether in the European institutions, in the Member States, in the diplomatic community, in business, academia, civil society and, of course, in my neighborhood — has been a real pleasure and a great privilege for me and my wife Mayumi.

I will remember, above all, the warmth that so many of you have shown to me and my wife, and to my colleagues at the Mission. For that, I am deeply grateful.

I am blessed, getting to know so many of you.

But I may not have been so lucky with the weather here.

For the past 3 years, the sun has not been kind to me for all three annual garden receptions that I have hosted — Last

year's Brussels Japan Festival commemorating the 50th anniversary of Japan-EU relations was really terrible. It poured.

So, I have no doubt that my successor, Ambassador Tsukada, will bring all his luck with the weather to next year's reception, as we are leaving Brussels next month.

Lastly, let me warmly thank our generous partners — without whom tonight would not have been possible.

Yakult, with their trademark probiotic drinks, Saga Prefecture and Land of Sake, Japan National Tourism Organization, All Nippon Airways, Japan Airlines, and the Paris office of CLAIR — the Council of Local Authorities for International Relations —. Thank you so much to all.

Last but not least, let me also say thank-you to my colleagues at the Mission. They are wonderful people to work with, and my wife and I will really miss them when we get back to Tokyo.

Thank you all for being here tonight and I hope you will enjoy the food, the drinks, and the company.
So, may I invite you to raise your glasses.

To our enduring friendship and partnership, and to Brussels' wonderful memories.

Cheers and Kanpai!