



**EUROPEAN COUNCIL
THE PRESIDENT**

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**Herman VAN ROMPUY
President of the European Council**

speech at the Kobe University Brussels European Centre

Let me start by saying a very simple word. A word which is maybe not used so often in politics: thank you. And let me even try it in Japanese: **ありがとうございます = Dōmo ariGAtō !**

Indeed, I should like to thank Kobe University for bestowing this honour upon me. It is a privilege. And I should also like to thank you, Mr. President, for your kind and generous words.

I do not know for sure whether I deserve the honour. But just in case I do not, I will certainly try, during the remainder of my mandate as President of the European Council, to make sure that I do deserve the honour by the time I leave office! *(So in that case, you will have made a good investment in the future!)*

I do think it is important to energise the relationship between the European Union and Japan. We should aim to do so at all levels: politically, economically and between our civil societies and universities.

As I said during my visit to Japan in April last year, I attach a great importance to our relationship. Both on the European and on the Japanese side, we may tend to underestimate its potential. And this is why the work which you, as Kobe University, are doing is so important. Your European Centre in fact is the first ever overseas office of a Japanese university in Brussels, and I should like to congratulate you on that. With this opening, you create a new hub for our relationship. A new and strong knot combining all the threads that link our two societies.

The political changes in the world -- the rise of China, India and other emerging economies -- affect both of us. They change the political landscape, our respective relationships with the United States for instance. However, we can benefit still more than ever from a strong relationship. It remains key to our prosperity.

The summit between Japan and the EU, which was held in Tokyo in April of last year, was for me one of the most interesting international meetings of 2010. *And not only because it was an inspiration for my haikus!*

P R E S S

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It was a privilege to meet the Emperor and the then Prime Minister Hatoyama. Later last year, at the two G20 meetings, I met Prime Minister Naoto Kan. I am looking forward to receive the Prime Minister in Brussels later this year for the EU Japan Summit. I hope to be able to bring a strong message on behalf of the European Council.

Some of you may be less familiar with the intricacies of the Brussels system. And I know it is not easy for outsiders to grasp it! However, the same is true for political life in Washington or Tokyo. Complexity is a feature of almost any system of government. ... *Except for dictatorships!* One could see the European Council of the 27 Heads of State or Government as the Union's strategy body.

This distinguishes our work from what the Commission, the Parliament and the Council are doing at a daily basis: turning legislative proposals into rules for our 500 million citizens and our millions of companies.

The work of the European Council, of a more general and political nature, is about determining the direction, about setting the course. Where do we go? And by now I can tell you from experience: to get 27 Heads of State or Government in the same direction, is no easy task!

We succeed nevertheless. All 27 share the conviction that we belong together and have to work together. It is as true in economic matters as it is in dealing with the recent events in the rest of the Arab world. And it is also true for the way we see our relationship with Japan.

I just said that we can strengthen our relationship:

- in political terms;
- in economic terms;
- and in terms of the contacts between our societies.

Let me say a brief word on each of these three subjects in turn.

First on the front of politics proper. We have a lot in common, as I said. Japan is a peace loving country. You have never used force since 1945. You are a force of stability in a region where old-style power games reappear.

Both the European Union and Japan aspire to play a stronger role on the international scene. Yet our cooperation on political issues falls well short of what it should be. We could do more together, like we already do for police training in Afghanistan, or in fighting piracy off the Somali coast. Think of working together on counterterrorism or on non-proliferation.

Another such issue is disaster relief. In Europe we have noticed with interest the recent actions taken by Japan in this respect. For instance after the earthquake in Haiti and the floods in Pakistan, both during 2010. That's why one may appreciate the Japanese proposal of a Japan-EU cooperation in the field of disaster relief, the so-called "Ueta-initiative", which was tabled last month.

The second point, how to intensify our economic relationship? Even in the changing world of today, and even if we energise our political bonds, trade -- *pure trade* -- will remain the backbone of our relationship. An obvious way to intensify the trade between our two blocks would be a Free Trade Agreement.

The European Union is aware of Japan's strong interest in embarking on negotiating a Free-Trade Agreement. I think it would also be of interest for European businesses and consumers.

Today a High Level Group examines the possibilities and that work is still going on. Therefore it is still too early to say what the EU position will be at the next summit on the possible launch of a Free Trade Agreement process.

However, at this stage I can already make two general points. Such an upgrading of the trade relationship should be *comprehensive* and *balanced*. Comprehensive, because we see trade in the terms of our overall political relationship. Balanced, because the kinds of barriers faced by EU and Japanese companies on the respective markets are different in nature. I will not speak in front of this audience about technical issues such as "non-tariff barriers", but this aspect should be taken into account. The benefits of abandoning tariffs should not all fall on one side. But we are open to discuss it. And I am convinced we will reach a good result together.

This brings me to the third point: the contacts between our two societies. Students, business people, travellers & tourists: the exchange of ideas and perspectives is key. And ..., this of course is really what the Brussels European Centre of Kobe University is about.

I was pleased to learn that in the overseas institutes your University is establishing, this one here is only the second -- after the centre opened two years ago in Beijing (*which indeed, as the capital of your neighbour, may deserve a special place...*). Therefore I take this Brussels Centre itself as a sign of your strong interest in establishing stronger relations with Europe and our Universities.

As you know, the very institution of the "University" was a European invention. Think of Bologna, Oxford, the Sorbonne, or Leuven: venerable places of learning going all the way back to the Middle Ages. And yet our universities from all over the continent are very strong global players, at the cutting-edge of innovation, and oriented toward the future.

A side remark. It is my conviction that our two societies share this unique capacity to link old experiences and ancient wisdom to the challenges of our own age. In Europe and in Japan, men and women do not only live in the present, forgetting about the past and walking blind into the future. No, we permanently build bridges from the past to the future, to allow us to step forward with confidence. This gives our societies an inner stability, an ability to deal with the many challenges and unknown elements which we face in the world of today, while keeping the core of our identity. People elsewhere may envy us for that.

The European Union welcomes the Japanese efforts of internationalisation of academic life. I was impressed to discover that your country wants to achieve, by 2020, to have 300.000 Japanese students abroad, and 300.000 foreign students in Japan. Compared to current numbers, these are certainly ambitious targets! You will thus no doubt attract more "global talent", people who can think on their own and bring new perspectives. The effect on society will be considerable.

Kobe University clearly shows this openness to the world already. By establishing this Brussels office. But also for instance by your role in the EU Institute Japan "Kansai" -- the institute which it was my pleasure to visit last year.

We in the European Union have played an important role in the internationalisation of academic life. First, internally, we developed the famous "Erasmus Program" for student exchanges. Over the years, it has allowed more than 2 million students to study in another European country. More recently, we have developed a global variant: "Erasmus Mundus", which aims at enhancing international mobility.

However, too few Japanese students have benefitted so far from Erasmus Mundus. There is untapped potential and I do hope it will be explored by the younger generations.

This is how I see the possibilities for energising all the relationships between the European Union and Japan. On the political and the economic side, and at the side of our societies and universities.

I am very grateful for the work you, as Kobe University, do in this respect. And that is why I am very confident that the title of your Conference will prove full of foresight. Today is indeed the first day of: "A new era of Japan - Europe Academic Cooperation".
