

**Address by the Speaker of the Saeima on 30 September 2021 in honour of the recipients of the Certificate of Commendation for their contribution to the development of the relations between Latvia and Japan**

*Your Excellency, honourable recipients of the Certificate of Commendation,*

I am truly honoured to have the opportunity to advance the strong ties between Latvia and Japan by doing everything within my power to support all initiatives of the Embassy of Japan launched during my term of office at the Saeima.

I greatly appreciate the contribution of the Embassy of Japan in Latvia and the personal contribution of H. E. Ambassador Yasuhiro Kawaguchi towards promoting the cultural and symbolic presence of Japan in Latvia. I extend my deepest gratitude to the Ambassador for his efforts to honour the outstanding citizens of Latvia for their unique contributions to building a bridge of friendship between Latvia and Japan.

Thus, today I am particularly moved and grateful for the opportunity to congratulate *the recipients of the Certificate of Commendation*, symbolising the appreciation of your long-lasting efforts by the Embassy and thus recording your names in the history of both of our countries.

Japan and Latvia are united by the love of music, Maestro Raimonds Pauls, Lūcija Garūta, and also Masaki Nakagawa!

I would like to start by honouring conductor Aira Birziņa, who has time and again woven Latvian and Japanese choirs together in a common thread, rousing Latvian admiration for the Japanese choir *Gaisma* while inspiring the Japanese people to continue learning about Latvia and improving their singing skills in the Latvian language. Honourable Aira Birziņa, your regard and efforts have created an environment producing the kind of synergy that, in my opinion, can only be created by those who have found their calling and their place amid an infinity of possibilities. I admire you and extend my gratitude to you.

Our great translator and Doctor of Philology Inguna Beķere has enabled thousands of Latvian readers to look into various historical and cultural realms through a Japanese lens. Perhaps, the greatest responsibility of a translator is to transfer often untranslatable cultural nuances, such as in the haiku. This can only be achieved by someone who has completely immersed oneself in both cultures and can build a bridge of language allowing readers to gain knowledge without first-hand experience and subsequently broaden their horizons. I thank you for that.

I am glad and honoured to acknowledge the Riga Culture Secondary School and the admirers of Japanese culture who made great efforts to establish a Japanese Language and Culture Secondary School. Graduates of this school continue to maintain and strengthen the ties between Latvia and Japan. I will say that, in the early nineties, it was courageous to establish a school to teach Japanese as a primary foreign language and to be persistent enough to bring this idea to life. I am pleased that the Riga Culture Secondary School has become a benchmark of discovering cultural diversity.

And, finally, I will take inspiration from news broadcasts and conclude my speech on a more dynamic note. The Embassy of Japan commends our athlete Vsevolods Zeļonijs, who, through his enormous power of will, perseverance, and countless training sessions, competitions, awards, and medals, has brought judo closer to Latvia, and not just as a sports discipline. The Latvian Olympic athlete Mr Zeļonijs has also provided many of his students with a pathway to the rich spiritual and moral cultural heritage of East Asian martial arts. I also thank you for promoting Latvia in international competitions.

I am glad that we can celebrate the 30th anniversary of the restoration of diplomatic relations between Latvia and Japan by honouring our outstanding citizens at the Embassy of Japan in Latvia.

Ladies and gentlemen, let me once more extend my warmest congratulations to you! May Latvia and Japan enter another fruitful decade of diplomatic relations!