

Section 5

Europe

1 Overview

<The Importance of Cooperation with Europe, with which Japan Shares Fundamental Values and Principles>

The European Union (EU) and European countries are important partners for Japan, and share fundamental values and principles such as freedom, democracy, the rule of law, and human rights. Amidst the spread of the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19), cooperation with a unified EU is necessary to respond to the challenges faced by the international community and to realize fundamental values in the international community.

European countries pursue common policies across a wide range of fields such as diplomacy and security, economy, and state finance, through various frameworks including the EU. They also play an important role in formulating standards in the international community utilizing international frameworks. The countries also influence international opinion benefiting from their language, history, cultural and artistic activities, and through communication activities utilizing major media organizations and think tanks. Cooperation with Europe is important in enhancing Japan's presence and influence in the international community.

<Response to COVID-19 in Europe>

COVID-19 has been rapidly spreading in Europe since March 2020. This has made responding to COVID-19 the biggest challenge for European countries and the new EU leadership inaugurated in December 2019.

Since March 2020, European countries implemented strict national restrictions, including lockdowns. Within Europe, there were moves by Schengen States to introduce border control measures within the Schengen Area, in which national borders have been abolished based on the Schengen Agreement, which ensures freedom of movement between European countries. However in May, the EU called for the gradual lift of measures at EU internal borders and member states responded to ensure freedom of movement within the area once again. In regard to measures at the EU external borders, the EU issued guidelines on border measures in March while emphasizing cooperation within the area. Based on these recommendations, EU member states and Schengen-associated countries implemented restrictions on entry from outside the area, which were gradually eased starting in July.

Since autumn of the year, there was a resurgence in the spread of COVID-19 infections with the number of new cases exceeding the first wave. In response to this, European countries have reintroduced strict national restrictions. In December,

a new variant of COVID-19 was identified in the UK, and some countries reintroduced national entry restrictions. As being illustrated, Europe faces the difficulty of balancing freedom of movement and economic activity with preventing the spread of infections.

In the series of responses to COVID-19, the EU was pointed out to be slow to take initial response. Indeed, there was a gap in opinions about how to provide assistance to member states, making it a challenge for the EU to strengthen European unity through specific measures. On the other hand, the EU has been providing support to non-EU countries as international cooperation in response to COVID-19 since April, and hosted a pledging conference in May. In July, the EU leaders led by France and Germany demonstrated European unity by agreeing on the recovery plan for Europe, a recovery instrument and the next seven-year budget of the EU, toward Europe's economic recovery. In regard to vaccines, the EU negotiated with several pharmaceutical companies on behalf of the member states. As a result, the vaccines secured by the EU began to be administered in member states in late December.

<Brexit and Negotiations on Future Relations>

Along with the response to COVID-19, Brexit and the subsequent negotiations on the future relations between the EU and the UK were one of the largest pending issues for Europe. The UK left the EU on January 31, 2020, and a transition period began in February 2020 during which EU law continued to apply to the UK after Brexit. The transition period's deadline was the end of 2020, and in June, both the EU and the UK confirmed that it would not be extended. Negotiations on the future relations between the EU and the UK began in March. However, difficulties were encountered in the negotiations over a level playing field, governance (dispute resolution), and the fishing industry. In December, the EU and UK leaders held successive in-person meetings and telephone calls. The conclusion of the negotiations

was announced on December 24, just before the deadline for the transition period. Although the deliberations in the European Parliament were postponed until 2021, it was decided that the EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement would be provisionally applied from January 1, 2021, following the procedures of both the EU and the UK.

<Relations with Countries and Regions Outside Europe>

In regard to relations with countries and regions outside Europe, relations with Russia continue to be a priority issue for Europe, as they have implications for Europe's security environment, including the response to the situation surrounding Ukraine, the arms control system, and cyber. Although China has provided support and publicity to Europe regarding COVID-19, a sense of vigilance against China is growing due to matters such as the situation concerning Hong Kong and human rights issues. In her State of the Union Address in September, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen described the EU's relationship with China as simultaneously one of the most strategically important and one of the most challenging. There is also growing concern in Europe about disinformation.

During the Meeting of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Ministers of Foreign Affairs in December, there was discussion on the changing global balance of power, including the situation in Asia, and the need for like-minded democratic nations to protect common values and to cooperate was emphasized.

In regard to relations with the U.S., European countries welcomed the election of President-elect Biden. In December, the European Commission released "A new EU-US agenda for global change," expressing hope for stronger U.S.-European relations in a wide range of areas, including climate change, economy, digital and trade. In neighboring areas of Europe, focus was on ensuring the unity of Europe in the field of diplomacy related to the situation concerning Belarus after the

presidential election and Turkey with regard to its actions in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea. Lastly, in the Indo-Pacific region, interest in the Indo-Pacific within the EU is growing, including the release of policy papers concerning the region by Germany and the Netherlands respectively in September and November.

<Multilayered, Attentive Diplomacy with Europe>

In Europe, the spread of COVID-19 has raised awareness of the importance of fundamental values such as freedom, democracy, and human rights. However, there have been differences in the views of countries on matters such as the recovery instrument, the rule of law, and relations with countries outside the region. While Europe has become a “mosaic” in terms of which policy to take in the field of security, free trade, and relations with non-European countries, Japan supports a strongly united Europe and conducts multilayered, attentive diplomacy with them. In 2020, despite limitations on in-person visits by dignitaries due to COVID-19, diplomacy using teleconference meetings and telephone calls was actively developed.

In regard to bilateral relations with European countries, high-level dialogues were held to confirm matters including cooperation on responding to COVID-19. With the UK, Prime Minister Abe held a summit telephone call with Prime Minister Boris Johnson in March. Foreign Minister Motegi visited the UK in August as a first foreign visit since the spread of COVID-19, and held various meetings including Japan-UK Foreign Ministers' Meeting. For France, Prime Minister Abe held a summit telephone call with President Emmanuel Macron in March. From September to October, Foreign Minister Motegi visited France following Portugal, and held a Foreign Ministers' Meeting and other meetings. With Germany, Prime Minister Abe held a teleconference meeting with Chancellor Angela Merkel in July. Since his inauguration in September, Prime Minister Suga has held summit telephone calls with the leaders of

the UK, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and more to exchange views on responding to COVID-19 and on a “Free and Open Indo-Pacific” (FOIP).

In the context of Japan-EU relations, close cooperation is conducted based on the Japan-EU Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA), which entered into force in February 2019, and the Japan-EU Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA), of which the provisional application started at the same time. In May, Prime Minister Abe held a Japan-EU Leaders Video Teleconference Meeting with President von der Leyen of the European Commission and President Charles Michel of the European Council to confirm Japan-EU cooperation on COVID-19 countermeasures and other issues. Prime Minister Suga held telephone calls with each of the two EU leaders after his inauguration in September. In addition to close cooperation on the situation in East Asia, the three leaders confirmed cooperation for the further development of Japan-EU relations in a wide range of areas, including digital, environment and climate change. Concerning relations with NATO, the Individual Partnership and Cooperation Programme Between Japan and NATO was revised in June. At the Meeting of NATO Ministers of Foreign Affairs in December, Japan made a statement by Foreign Minister Motegi read out through the Ambassador of Japan to NATO, stating that NATO is a reassuring partner for the severe security environment in East Asia and FOIP, which is promoted by Japan.

Regarding the regions of the Visegrad Group (V4), the Baltic States, and the Western Balkans, multilayered diplomacy was implemented with promotion of cooperation through bilateral relations and the EU as well as promotion of cooperative relations through dialogue with Japan.

Furthermore, Japan conducts public diplomacy activities including dispatching experts, cooperation with European think tanks and Japan's Friendship Ties Programs “MIRAI” for intellectual and people-to-people exchange that allows young



Japan-EU Leaders Video Teleconference Meeting
(May 26, Tokyo; Photo: Cabinet Public Relations Office)

people from Europe to visit Japan. These activities are aimed to promote the right picture of Japan and Asia and mutual understanding. Particularly by utilizing online exchanges, Japan is working on strengthening relations with Europe by conducting information-sharing and exchanges of views with European countries, organizations, and experts in a wide range of fields such as politics, security, economy, business, science and technology, education, culture and art.

2 Regional Situations in Europe

(1) The European Union (EU)

The EU is a political and economic union consisting of 27 member states with a total population of about 446 million. Sharing fundamental values and principles, the EU is an important partner for Japan in addressing global issues.

<Recent Developments of the EU>

The new EU leadership began in December 2019, including the inauguration of President of the European Council Michel and President of the European Commission von der Leyen. Response to COVID-19 and Brexit were the top priorities for the new EU leadership. In 2020, the European economy was majorly impacted by the unprecedented crisis of the global outbreak of COVID-19. In March, COVID-19 spread rapidly in Europe, beginning from Italy. It was pointed out that the EU's initial response was slow, which called into question the unity of Europe as a whole. Borders

within the EU were revived as member states closed their own borders, which impeded freedom of movement, a cornerstone of the EU, and caused confusion and damage to the market within the EU.

The EU set forth a variety of measures and countermeasures including economic support since mid-March. In April, the EU announced that it would support non-EU countries and lead international support events as part of its international cooperation in response to COVID-19. A schedule for Europe's economic recovery was announced, and discussions on the creation of a recovery instrument began. In May, the European Commission proposed the recovery plan for Europe totaling 1.85 trillion euro comprising NextGenerationEU (the so-called recovery instrument) (750 billion euro) and the next Multiannual Financial Framework (EU budget for 2021-2027) (about 1.1 trillion euro). On July 21, the European Council agreed to a package of 1.824 trillion euro, consisting of the recovery instrument (750 billion euro) and the next EU budget (1.074 trillion euro), demonstrating the unity of Europe. In November, a political agreement was reached with the European Parliament on the recovery plan for Europe package. However, Hungary and Poland indicated that they would refuse to approve it because of its conditionality on the "rule of law," a fundamental principle of the EU, and discussions and negotiations continued. A compromise agreement was reached with the European Parliament on December 11. The recovery instrument and the budget for the next period were approved respectively in the European Parliament on December 16 and in the European Council on December 17.

In addition, in response to moves by member states to revive their internal borders, the EU issued guidelines in March on strengthening border measures with the rest of the world, emphasizing cooperation within the Schengen Area, although the member states have authority over their border control. In accordance with the guidelines, member states began to impose restrictions on

entry from outside the region. The restrictions were started in March and extended until the end of June, and then relaxed in July for some countries, including Japan, in accordance with the recommendation that the restrictions should be eased in a gradual and coordinated manner.

On the economic front, the Eurozone economy in 2020 suffered a severe shock in the first half of the year. Although it recovered strongly in the third quarter due to the gradual easing of containment measures, the resurgence of COVID-19 led to a slowdown in economic activity.

<Brexit>

At the end of January, the UK left the EU. In February, a transition period began in which EU laws continued to apply to the UK after its exit from the EU. In March, negotiations began on future relations, including a trade agreement between the EU and the UK. In order to minimize the negative impact of Brexit on Japanese companies operating in the UK and EU member states, the Government of Japan encouraged both the EU and the UK to conclude negotiations within the transition period. The negotiations were concluded on December 24, just before the end of 2020, which was the deadline for the transition period. Following the procedures in both the EU and the UK, the provisional application of the EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement began on January 1, 2021. The UK Parliament completed its procedures by the end of 2020, and the agreement is expected to enter into force with the approval of the European Parliament in the first half of 2021.

<Japan-EU Relations>

Japan and the EU are strengthening their cooperation under the Japan-EU EPA, which entered into force in February 2019, and the Japan-EU SPA, of which provisional application started at the same time. The impact of COVID-19 made it difficult to hold in-person meetings. However, during the Japan-EU Leaders Video Teleconference Meeting

in May, there was an exchange of views centered on COVID-19 countermeasures, including economic measures for recovery. It was confirmed to promote cooperation based on fundamental principles and shared values, and to strengthen cooperation in order to contribute to the resolution of regional issues including North Korea, the East China Sea and the South China Sea. Following his inauguration, Prime Minister Suga held Japan-EU Leaders' telephone calls with President Michel of the European Council in September and with President von der Leyen of the European Commission in October. In addition, Foreign Minister Motegi held a Japan-EU foreign ministers' telephone call with High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell in November, in which they shared the views on the importance of cooperation between Japan and the EU for realizing FOIP. Furthermore, Foreign Minister Motegi became the first Japanese Foreign Minister to attend virtually the EU Foreign Affairs Council, which was held in January 2021. During the meeting, he explained Japan's views and initiatives for FOIP. In response, many EU member states expressed their understanding and support for the importance of a rules-based international order in the Indo-Pacific, and Japan and the EU shared the view to further promote cooperation in areas such as connectivity and maritime security.

On the economic front, economic ties between Japan and the EU have become even stronger with the legal basis of the Japan-EU EPA, which entered into force in February 2019. In order to ensure the steady implementation of the Agreement, the Japan-EU EPA Joint Committee as well as the specialized committees and working groups covering 12 fields established under the EPA have been reviewing the implementation status of the Agreement and discussing future initiatives to further promote trade between Japan and the EU. As COVID-19 spread in 2020, the second meetings of the specialized committees and working groups established under the Agreement were held in turn virtually. At each meeting, the status

of implementation of each item stipulated in the EU-Japan EPA and matters of mutual interest between Japan and the EU were confirmed, and future initiatives and cooperative systems between Japan and the EU were discussed. Going forward, Japan will continue to further develop Japan-EU economic relations by ensuring the steady implementation of the Agreement and through other Japan-EU dialogue frameworks.

Furthermore, on June 22, Japan and the EU signed the Agreement on Civil Aviation Safety between the European Union and Japan. This agreement aims to reduce the burdens on the aviation industry and promote the free flow of civil aeronautical products by removing duplication in inspections and other procedures for the import and export of aircraft and other civil aeronautical products.

(2) United Kingdom

In the UK, so-called lockdown measures were introduced when COVID-19 began to spread in March. Infections began to slow down following that, but began to resurge since summer. In December, a new variant of COVID-19 emerged in the UK. At the beginning of the outbreak of COVID-19, the Johnson administration's approval rating temporarily increased, but it subsequently declined due to the increase in the number of deaths in the UK and the growing criticism over the administration's measures. On the other hand, Mr. Jeremy Corbyn, the opposition Labour Party's leader, resigned following the party's defeat in the general election at the end of 2019, and a new leader, Mr. Keir Starmer, took office in April. Mr. Starmer, who is considered to be centrist, harshly criticized the Johnson administration's COVID-19 response, and the Labour Party's approval rating rose to almost equal with that of the Conservative Party.

Brexit has been one of the biggest issues in the UK-EU relationship since the UK's June 2016 referendum on leaving the EU. Following parliamentary approval on both sides for the Withdrawal



Japan-UK Foreign Ministers' Meeting (August 5, London, UK)

Agreement between the UK and the EU, the UK left the EU on January 31, 2020. Negotiations on the EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement after Brexit began in March and were concluded on December 24. The bill to implement the draft Withdrawal Agreement was passed by both houses of UK Parliament on December 30. The Withdrawal Agreement was provisionally applied from January 2021, thus avoiding a situation of tariffs being established between the UK and the EU following the end of the transition period at the end of December.

As for Japan-UK relations, the UK has been strengthening its involvement in the Indo-Pacific region. Even as COVID-19 spreads, dialogue and exchanges have continued at various levels between Japan and the UK, including at the summit level and the foreign minister level, and bilateral relations have been strengthened. Prime Minister Abe held summit telephone calls with Prime Minister Johnson in March and September, in which they exchanged views regarding matters such as COVID-19 countermeasures. Prime Minister Suga also held a summit telephone call with Prime Minister Johnson in September, during which Prime Minister Johnson congratulated Prime Minister Suga on his appointment. The leaders confirmed that they would cooperate to further develop bilateral relations, including strengthening cooperation in the security field toward the realization of FOIP. They also agreed to cooperate toward the Olympic and Paralympic Games Tokyo 2020.

Column

Japan-UK Season of Culture

Japan and the UK have a history of exchange spanning more than 400 years, since the English sea captain and pilot, William Adams (Miura Anjin), first drifted to present-day Oita Prefecture on a Dutch ship in 1600.

Japan-UK relations are important in a wide variety of fields including politics and economy, but cultural exchange is indispensable for strengthening the bonds between the people of the two countries. In August 2017, then-Prime Minister Abe and then-Prime Minister Theresa May agreed to hold "the Japan-UK Season of Culture" as an event that bridged the Rugby World Cup 2019 and the Olympic and Paralympic Games Tokyo 2020. Under this initiative, the "Japan Season of Culture in the UK" showcases the multi-faceted appeal of modern Japan from its culture and art to innovation and cutting-edge technology in areas such as medicine, science and industry. Building on ongoing grassroots exchanges and local community activities, various events have been held to strengthen the ties between the citizens of the two countries in the long term.

A large-scale exhibition project held under this program is the "Manga" exhibition held at the British Museum from May to August in 2019. This exhibition drew about 180,000 visitors and recorded the largest number of visitors per day among the special exhibitions put up by the British Museum in 2019. The exhibition projects of 2020 were significantly impacted by the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. One of these projects, the "Kimono: Kyoto to Catwalk" exhibition held at the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) in London in February, shifted to an online exhibition and seminar when it was temporarily suspended due to the pandemic. After the on-site exhibition resumed, it remained so popular that booking slots were filled every day until it closed in October.

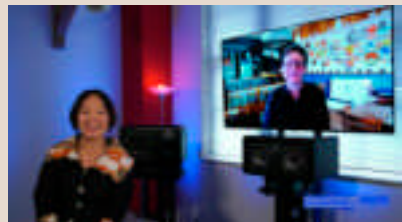
Many people from the UK visited Japan during the Rugby World Cup 2019. Following that, the "Rugby and the Olympics Special Exhibition" was held from November 2019 to August 2020 at the World Rugby Museum in London, further contributing to Japan-UK exchanges. In addition, a cooperation project has begun in which private Japanese organizations will donate more than 5,000 cherry trees all over the UK, as a symbol of friendship between the two countries.

The "Japan Matsuri Presents 2020" project held online in September drew the participation of about 50 groups and organizations from both Japan and the UK and featured Japanese culture and topics from many different facets, succeeding as a new online initiative. For example, the Tomioka Dance Club from Osaka Prefectural Tomioka High School harnessed new ideas and communication tools to present new dances, expressing how Japanese high school students strive hard toward their goals despite the circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic. Japan House London also organized a wide variety of online events, including seminars covering topics such as Japan-UK relations and the COVID-19 response by the two countries, and Japanese language speech contest for junior and senior high school students. Japan-related online events are involving the remote participation of many organizations, including universities and research organizations, making it possible for people to experience exchanges while remaining in their own homes.

The "Japan Season of Culture in the UK" has been extended till the end of 2021 since many events were postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. While it is unfortunate that various events have had to be postponed in 2020 due to the unexpected spread of COVID-19, various exchanges are still taking place mainly through online platforms. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, such continued exchanges made possible through the zeal of people from both Japan and the UK reflect the strong ties between the two countries that have lasted for more than 400 years.



Performance by the Tomioka Dance Club in "Japan Matsuri Presents 2020" (September, online event, Photo: Tomioka Dance Club)



Japanese cuisine demonstration in "Japan Matsuri Presents 2020" (September, online event, Photo: Japan Matsuri)

Foreign Minister Motegi held the Eighth Japan-UK Foreign Ministers' Strategic Dialogue with Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs Dominic Raab, who visited Japan in February, and confirmed the strengthening of bilateral cooperation in light of Brexit. In August, Foreign Minister Motegi visited the UK on his first overseas visit since the spread of COVID-19. He held a foreign ministers' meeting with Foreign Secretary Raab and negotiated the Japan-UK Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement with Secretary of State for International Trade Elizabeth Truss. After an agreement in principle was reached in September and being signed in October, the Agreement entered into force on January 1, 2021 (see the Special Feature on page 180).

With regard to culture, taking into account the effects of COVID-19, various events took place in Japan and the UK as part of the "Japan-UK Season of Culture," the period which bridges the two major sports events of the Rugby World Cup 2019 and the Olympic and Paralympic Games Tokyo 2020 (see the Column on page 126).

(3) France

Since he took office in May 2017, President Macron has promoted various reforms such as reform of labor laws, and he has achieved success in improving France's competitiveness and restoring public finances. On the other hand, the government's decision on the fuel tax increase in November 2018 brought about large-scale demonstrations known as the "yellow vests movement." In response to these demonstrations, President Macron implemented the "grand débat" to have direct dialogue himself with citizens throughout France, which resulted in improving his approval rating. However, in December 2019, large-scale strikes over the pension system reform proposal caused his approval rating to drop again. Amidst this situation, COVID-19 began to spread in France in February and March. President Macron made a televised speech explaining the restriction



Japan-France Foreign Ministers' Meeting
(October 1, Paris, France)

measures and calling for national unity. Due to this response, President Macron's approval rating rose again. In July, President Macron nominated Mr. Jean Castex, who had been in charge of easing restrictions related to the COVID-19 measures, as the new Prime Minister. In October, terrorist attacks occurred in France over caricatures of the Prophet Mohammed of Islam and other issues, making countermeasures against terrorism and extremism an urgent issue. With respect to external affairs, France continues to have a stance of placing importance on multilateralism. In response to the COVID-19 crisis, President Macron called for European unity and demonstrated his leadership by spearheading the establishment of the EU recovery instrument with Germany.

As for Japan-France bilateral relations, Prime Minister Abe held a summit telephone call with President Macron in March and confirmed that they would cooperate on responding to COVID-19. In May and June, Foreign Minister Motegi held telephone calls with Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs Jean-Yves Le Drian and confirmed that Japan and France would cooperate on responding to COVID-19 and in the international arena, and advance Japan-France cooperation in the Indo-Pacific. In October, Foreign Minister Motegi visited France and held a foreign ministers' meeting with Minister Le Drian. They confirmed the promotion of bilateral cooperation in responding to COVID-19 and in the Indo-Pacific, and the continued close cooperation on regional issues

surrounding the East China Sea, the South China Sea and North Korea. In the same month, Prime Minister Suga held a summit telephone call with President Macron, in which President Macron congratulated Prime Minister Suga on his appointment. They confirmed that, as “Indo-Pacific nations,” Japan and France will cooperate to further develop bilateral relations, including strengthening cooperation to realize a free and open Indo-Pacific. They also confirmed cooperation toward the Olympic and Paralympic Games Tokyo 2020.

(4) Germany

Before the spread of COVID-19, the approval rating for the federal grand coalition consisting of the Christian Democratic Union and Christian Social Union (CDU/CSU) and the Social Democratic Party (SPD) had been declining due to dissatisfaction with its refugee policy and other issues, repeated defeats in state elections, and the resignation of the leader of the CDU, whom Chancellor Merkel had nominated as her successor. However, Chancellor Merkel took necessary measures at a relatively early stage in response to the spread of COVID-19, and the number of new infections and deaths was kept at a lower level than in neighboring countries in Europe. In addition, in her first televised address to the nation in her 15-year tenure, Chancellor Merkel demonstrated leadership by calling for national unity, saying that the COVID-19 crisis was the greatest challenge for Germany since World War II. This caused the approval ratings for Chancellor Merkel and the CDU to rise significantly.

On July 1, Germany assumed the EU Presidency and played a leading role in Europe's response to the spread of COVID-19, including by contributing to the passage of the recovery plan for Europe in coordination with France.

In September, the Government of Germany indicated its intention to strengthen its engagement in the Indo-Pacific region by approving its Policy Guidelines for the Indo-Pacific, which emphasize the importance of freedom of navigation, the rule



Japan-Germany Foreign Ministers' Video Teleconference Meeting (October 1, France)

of law, and connectivity in the region, stating that “more than anywhere else, the shape of tomorrow's international order will be decided in the Indo-Pacific”

With regard to Japan-Germany bilateral relations, despite restrictions on international travel due to the spread of COVID-19, high-level exchanges continued, including two summit meetings and two foreign ministers' meetings held either as teleconference meetings or telephone calls. During the Japan-Germany Leaders Video Teleconference Meeting in July, in addition to exchanging views on cooperation on COVID-19 countermeasures, the two leaders agreed to cooperate to revitalize Japan-Germany relations toward the 160th Anniversary of Japan-Germany Friendship of the following year. During the Japan-Germany summit telephone call in September, Chancellor Merkel congratulated Prime Minister Suga on his inauguration, and the two leaders confirmed that they would closely cooperate on matters including realizing FOIP. During the Japan-Germany Foreign Ministers' Video Teleconference Meeting held in October following their telephone call in March, Foreign Minister Motegi praised the Policy Guidelines for the Indo-Pacific formulated by Germany, and the two ministers agreed to strengthen bilateral cooperation for the realization of FOIP.

(5) Italy

Although the Five Star Movement and the

Democratic Party formed an alliance and the second Conte Cabinet was inaugurated in August 2019, Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte needed to strike a balance between the ruling coalition parties, which have different political opinions. In addition, Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation Luigi Di Maio resigned as the leader of the Five Star Movement following the party's crushing defeat in local elections and internal problems. Although the constitutional amendment to reduce the size of the Italian Parliament promoted by the Five Star Movement was approved by a majority in a referendum in September, the party's approval rating declined. In January 2021, Italia Viva, one of the ruling coalition parties, withdrew from the government due to the conflict between the ruling coalition parties over the use of the European Stability Mechanism (ESM) in the healthcare field and the management of the European recovery instrument. In response, the Chamber of Deputies and Senate of the Republic held a vote of confidence for the Conte administration, and both votes were approved. On the other hand, as a result of the failure to secure an absolute majority in the Senate of the Republic, Prime Minister Conte announced his resignation. President Sergio Mattarella called on all the political parties to give confidence to a non-party cabinet to deal with the emergency situation, and former European Central Bank President Mario Draghi was inaugurated as Prime Minister in February 2021.

The initial spread of COVID-19 within Europe began in Italy, where two Chinese tourists were confirmed as the first positive cases at the end of January. The government declared a state of emergency on January 30. Infections spread to northern Italy at the end of February, and a nationwide lockdown was implemented in March. Due to his leadership in the health and hygiene crisis, Prime Minister Conte's approval rating remained in the 60% range. Various ordinances since March have announced large-scale economic measures centered on sectors affected by COVID-19. However,

in the second wave after November, the approval rating for Prime Minister Conte's administration declined as he lost the support of people who were economically disadvantaged by the restrictive measures.

As for Japan-Italy relations, in March, Foreign Minister Motegi held a telephone call with Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation Di Maio. The ministers explained the efforts being made by Japan and Italy in relation to COVID-19 and confirmed that both countries would discuss and cooperate on COVID-19 countermeasures in the international arena, including the G7 Foreign Ministers' Meeting. In October, Prime Minister Suga held a summit telephone call with Prime Minister Conte. They shared the view to closely cooperate on various issues facing the international community, including the response to COVID-19 at the G20, for which Italy assumed the Presidency in 2021. They also confirmed the cooperation to realize FOIP.

(6) Spain

In January, the second term administration of Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez was inaugurated, becoming the first coalition government since the democratization of Spain. A state of alarm was declared in response to the spread of COVID-19 in Spain beginning in early March. The minority ruling coalition government managed to extend the state of alarm and have economic and social relief measures approved in the Congress, gaining cooperation of other parties. It has maintained a certain level of support by the public after the spread of COVID-19.

In regard to Japan-Spain relations, Foreign Minister Motegi held a foreign ministers' telephone call with Minister of Foreign Affairs, European Union and Cooperation Arancha González Laya in May, and Prime Minister Abe held a summit telephone call with Prime Minister Sánchez in June. Japan and Spain shared the view to continue to cooperate on COVID-19 countermeasures, and to further deepen their strategic partnership

Column

100th Anniversary of Japan-Czech Republic and Japan-Slovakia Relations

The year 2020 marks the 100th anniversary of relations between Japan and the Czech Republic as well as the Slovak Republic.

Looking back to 1918, a century ago, the Austria-Hungary dual monarchy was dissolved following the end of World War I, and Czech and Slovak nations, which had been under the control of this empire, formed a joint state. This was how Czechoslovakia was founded. In October 1919, Foreign Minister of Czechoslovakia Edvard Beneš sent a letter to Foreign Minister of Japan Uchida Kosai, requesting for Japan's agreement on the dispatch of the first envoy extraordinary to Japan in order to establish diplomatic relations with Japan. In January 1920, Japan decided to accept the request and diplomatic relations were established.

Czechoslovakia went through a turbulent history after that, before achieving democracy in the Velvet Revolution of 1989 and peaceful separation and independence as the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic in 1993. Japan established diplomatic relations once again with the two countries respectively.

In marking the 100th anniversary of relations with the two countries that have overcome many difficulties, the global spread of the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) has unfortunately placed severe restrictions on the opportunities for Japan to commemorate the anniversary with the two countries. For example, it has become impossible to realize anticipated high-level mutual visits, and many cultural events have had to be suspended. Despite such circumstances, the relevant personnel have implemented commemorative projects as far as possible while assessing the situation of infections and putting the necessary measures in place.

In the Czech Republic, "Nagomi-Kyogenkai Czech," a traditional Japanese theater performance (*kyogen*) group under the Shigeyama Sengoro family of *kyogen* actors, held a performance in September that was cosponsored by the Senate of the Parliament of the Czech Republic and the Embassy of Japan in the Czech Republic. This *kyogen* group has given more than 800 public performances since its establishment in 2000. In spite of the serious pandemic situation, strong support from the Senate helped to realize an outdoor live performance with a small audience as well as a live streaming of the performance. The performance was attended by representatives of the Senate and Government of the Czech Republic, including President of the Senate Miloš Vystrčil and Foreign Minister Tomáš Petříček, as well as recipients of Japanese decorations, while the livestream drew as many as 5,000 viewers. Hence, the performance was an excellent opportunity for creating a strong impression of the friendly relations between the two countries. In addition, other projects that allow people to celebrate the anniversary from their homes were also held on the dedicated website. These included a photo contest and interviews of people who have made significant contributions to the development of relations with Japan over many years.

In Slovakia, a project to plant cherry trees, a symbol of Japan, in various parts of the country was held in cooperation with many involved parties, with the hope that the friendly relations between the two countries will last for a long time into the future. Eventually, in consideration of the COVID-19 situation at the local sites and other factors, approximately 450 cherry trees were planted in various parts of Slovakia.



100th anniversary commemorative logo for the two countries



Official telegram approving the dispatch of the first envoy extraordinary of Czechoslovakia to Japan, Karel Pergler (collection of the Diplomatic Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan)

Among these, the commemorative ceremony held in October at the Museum of Slovak National Uprising (SNP), located in the Banská Bystrica Region of central Slovakia, was attended by Minister of Foreign and European Affairs Ivan Korčok, and served as a valuable opportunity for further promoting friendly relations between Japan and Slovakia, as well as further revitalizing mutual exchanges.

Despite the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic had on the anniversary and the difficult situation faced by the two countries, it was still a year of strong affirmation that Japan and the two countries are important partners that share fundamental values. Taking the opportunity of this anniversary year, Japan will continue to deepen exchanges in various areas to realize further development of the long friendly ties between the two countries.



Kyogen performance at the Senate of the Czech Republic



Tree-planting by Ambassador of Japan to the Slovak Republic, Nakagawa Makoto, and Minister of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, Ivan Korčok

and cooperate toward further developing bilateral relations, including further strengthening Japan-Spain economic relations, promoting cooperation toward realizing FOIP, and expanding people-to-people exchanges when exchanges could be restarted.

3 Collaboration with European Regional Institutions, and the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM)

(1) Cooperation with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

As a military alliance that aims at providing collective defense for its 30 member countries, NATO provides collective defense for its member countries, and also provides engagement in cooperative security efforts with non-EU countries and organizations and in crisis management outside of the region that could pose a direct threat to the security of the territories and peoples of NATO member countries, including security-keeping operations in Kosovo, support in Afghanistan, and counter-terrorism efforts. At the Meeting of

NATO Ministers for Foreign Affairs held online in December, there were discussions on NATO's policy for 2030 as well as on Afghanistan, Russia and the situation concerning Asia. A statement by Foreign Minister Motegi was read out by Ambassador of Japan to NATO, stating that the security environment in East Asia today has become increasingly severe due to unilateral attempts to change the status quo, and that NATO is a reassuring partner for the FOIP vision promoted by Japan.

Japan and NATO are partners that share fundamental values, and both have been taking specific steps toward collaboration based on the Individual Partnership and Cooperation Programme (IPCP) (revised in May 2018 and June 2020), which was signed in May 2014. Japan has participated as an observer in NATO's crisis management exercises (CMX), as well as training exercises related to humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HA/DR). Japan has also dispatched a female Self-Defense Force official to the NATO headquarters for the third time since November 2019 in order to promote Japan-NATO cooperation on cyber issues,

women, peace and security (WPS) and other fields. Through the Partnership for Peace (PfP) Trust Fund, a project that aims to promote arms control and disarmament, as well as democratization and regional stabilization, utilizing NATO's specialized military expertise, Japan has also been providing support to process unexploded ordnance in Ukraine, and to help capacity building for demilitarization of Serbia's Ministry of Defense arsenal.

(2) Cooperation with the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)

OSCE is a regional security organization with 57 participating States across Europe, Central Asia, and North America, that works to bridge differences between member countries and foster trust through conflict prevention, crisis management, and post-conflict recovery and reconstruction in these regions through a comprehensive approach. Japan has taken part in OSCE activities since 1992 as an Asian Partner for Co-operation. Japan provides support for preventing terrorism by means such as strengthening border patrol in Afghanistan and Central Asia through the Border Management Staff College (a capacity building organization) in Tajikistan, and also gives support in conducting election monitoring as well as to the projects that promote women's social advancement. Considering that the OSCE plays an important role in improving the situation in Ukraine. Japan provides financial support to the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission (SMM) and intermittently dispatched experts to the SMM from August 2015. At the Council of Foreign Ministers meeting held online in December, State Minister for Foreign Affairs Uto Takashi issued a video message, stating that Asia and Europe need to share recognition of the security environment amidst increasing transnational threats, and that the OSCE's trust-building function plays an

important role for such need. He also explained the severe security environment in East Asia, including the East China Sea, the South China Sea and North Korea, and introduced Japan's efforts toward realizing FOIP.

(3) Cooperation with the Council of Europe (CoE)

The CoE is an international organization comprising 47 member states in Europe. It has played a key role in establishing international standards in areas concerning democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. As the CoE's sole observer country in Asia, Japan has made active contributions to a range of CoE activities since it began participating in the organization in 1996. In the meetings on artificial intelligence (AI) held in July and December, university professors and expert government officials from Japan attended online and delivered keynote speeches and policy statements. In addition, Japan provided financial support for the meetings related to the Cybercrime Convention Committee held from November 30 to December 3 in the video teleconference format.

(4) Cooperation through the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM)

ASEM was established in 1996 as the sole forum for dialogue and cooperation between Asia and Europe. It currently comprises 51 countries and two institutions, and works through summit meetings, ministers' meetings, seminars, and other activities focused on three pillars, namely (1) politics, (2) economy, and (3) society and culture.

In September, a statement on COVID-19 by the foreign ministers of the ASEM host nation and regional coordinator countries¹ was released. As an ASEM partner, Japan contributed to the discussions from the beginning, and the statement was a timely confirmation of cooperation for responding to COVID-19.

¹ Cambodia (host nation), regional coordinator countries (EU, Germany (representing Europe), Singapore (representing ASEAN) and Russia (representing Asia except ASEAN))

The 13th ASEM Summit was scheduled to be held in Cambodia in November. However, due to the global spread of COVID-19, a decision was made to postpone the meeting to June 2021.

The Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF), ASEM's only permanent institution, is located in Singapore and is responsible for activities in the fields of society and culture, which is one of ASEM's pillars. In August, Mr. Morikawa Toru took office as the first Japanese Executive Director of ASEF (see the Special Feature on page 134).

Japan supports the ASEF's public health activities such as the ASEM Initiative for the Rapid Containment of Pandemic Influenza and works together with ASEF on emergency operations to provide ASEM partners with stockpiled items in order to respond to the outbreak of infectious diseases in their countries, as well as on workshops on capacity-building to tackle public health emergencies. In February, in response to the outbreak

of COVID-19, Japan provided protective gowns, safety goggles, examination gloves, alcohol disinfectant and other supplies from the ASEF's stockpile to China, Cambodia, the Philippines, Laos and Mongolia.

Furthermore, taking into account that a rapid spread of COVID-19 or other diseases would have a significant impact on the Japanese economy and global economy, Japan decided to contribute approximately 5.7 billion yen to the ASEF for the Support Project for Prevention of Spread of COVID-19 and Other Diseases in ASEM Partners to stockpile medical use personal protective equipment (PPE) and antiviral drugs necessary for infection countermeasures and to provide them promptly upon request from ASEM partners.

In addition, Japan contributed to the activities of ASEM through cohosting with the ASEF Classroom Network Conference (October-December) online, and through the financial contributions to ASEF.

Special
FeatureElection of Ambassador Morikawa Toru,
as the Executive Director of the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF)

The member states of the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) extend over Asia and Europe, and their populations make up approximately 60% of the world's population, while they contribute to more than 50% of the global GDP. It is important to further strengthen not only economic relations, but also people-to-people exchanges and cooperative relations, between two such influential regions. The Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF), was founded in 1997, the year after the inaugural ASEM was convened, as the sole permanent body of ASEM. It plays an important role in promoting mutual understanding extensively between Asia and Europe, and conducts exchange activities in a wide range of areas including culture, education, media, governance, environment, international health, and human rights.

The ASEF Executive Director and Deputy Executive Director are elected alternately from Asian and European member countries. In August, Mr. Morikawa Toru, a diplomatic official, became the first Japanese Executive Director of ASEF.

Around the same time, the spread of the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) placed severe constraints on people-to-people exchanges between Asia and Europe, raising questions about the future and ideal role for ASEF. The economies of all countries have been seriously impacted, and they could very well become inward-looking. This is precisely the time when it is vital for the people of Asia and Europe to revitalize exchanges and share wisdom in order to join hands to overcome this unprecedented crisis while harnessing their mutual individuality. While it has become difficult for the stakeholders to meet in person for many of ASEF's projects, ASEF is taking this opportunity to actively implement projects via online tools, and put creative effort into contributing to the further expansion and deepening of people-to-people exchanges between Asia and Europe.

Executive Director Morikawa holds a clear vision on the role and ideal state of the organization, and values universally applicable logic and a posture of respecting diversity. Ambassador Morikawa said as follows, "ASEF, which has been promoting various exchanges with 'diversity' as a key word, is called upon to fully utilize what it has built up to date and fulfill its role as a common platform for exchanges between Asia and Europe. To that end, it faces the challenges of further promoting digital transformation for projects, which advanced rapidly due to the COVID-19 pandemic, expanding its networks with civil society, and strengthening collaboration with the ASEM process." With this in mind, he is working tirelessly to strengthen ASEF's activities.

ASEF celebrates the 25th anniversary of its foundation in 2021. We are facing a question of how to picture the world after the COVID-19 pandemic. As we move toward the reconstruction of this post-pandemic world, there are many challenges that Japan is expected to contribute toward through ASEF, including international health and medical care, climate change and other environmental issues, and human rights under the new social conditions. In these circumstances, Japan aims to contribute further to the expansion of exchanges between Asia and Europe in a wide range of fields. ASEF's activities are expected to be further strengthened under the leadership of Executive Director Morikawa, and Japan will continue advancing its cooperation with ASEF.



Executive Director Morikawa giving a speech at the seminar organized by ASEF (December 10, Singapore; Photo: ASEF)



Photograph with participants of the seminar organized by ASEF (Center: Executive Director Morikawa) (December 10, Singapore; Photo: ASEF)

Other European Regions

[Nordic countries]

Denmark: In August, Foreign Minister Motegi held a telephone call with Foreign Minister Jeppe Kofod. They exchanged views on cooperation for various issues facing the international community, including COVID-19 countermeasures, and concurred to deepen bilateral cooperative relations based on the Strategic Partnership between Japan and Denmark.

Finland: In November, on a foreign minister's telephone call, Foreign Minister Pekka Haavisto expressed to Foreign Minister Motegi his will to cooperate in realizing FOIP. They also shared the view to closely cooperate on issues facing the international community, including climate change and international health issues.

Norway: In November, Foreign Minister Motegi held a telephone call with Foreign Minister Ine Eriksen Sørdeide. They shared the view to strengthen cooperation in the areas of climate change and the marine environment, exchanged views on international cooperation in COVID-19 countermeasures, and confirmed to closely cooperate in the international arena in light of Norway becoming a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council from 2021. In December, Prime Minister Suga held a summit telephone call with Prime Minister Erna Solberg. They confirmed cooperation for the High-Level Panel for a Sustainable Ocean Economy led by Norway and for COVID-19 countermeasures, as well as other cooperation in the international arena including the UN Security Council.

Sweden: In April, Prime Minister Abe held a summit telephone call with Prime Minister Stefan Löfven. They exchanged views on COVID-19 countermeasures, and confirmed close cooperation between Japan and Sweden.

Iceland: In May, Foreign Minister Motegi held a telephone call with Foreign Minister Guðlaugur Þór Þórðarson, during which they exchanged views on COVID-19 countermeasures.

They also exchanged views on the promotion of women's empowerment and cooperative relations in the Arctic. They shared the view to further promote exchanges following the end of COVID-19 and to strengthen bilateral relations.

[Benelux countries]

The Netherlands: In May, Foreign Minister Motegi held a telephone call with Foreign Minister Stef Blok. They exchanged views on bilateral relations and the response to COVID-19. In December, Prime Minister Suga held a summit telephone call with Prime Minister Mark Rutte, in which they confirmed the strengthening of bilateral relations and cooperation in the international arena. Prime Minister Suga also welcomed the Netherlands' release of its own Indo-Pacific Guidelines, and the two leaders confirmed their cooperation in realizing FOIP.

Belgium: In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, an agreement was reached among seven parties (the Dutch-speaking and French-speaking socialist, liberal, and ecologist parties as well as the Dutch-speaking Christian party), and the new cabinet of Prime Minister Alexander De Croo was formed on October 1. It took 493 days to form the cabinet after the general election in May 2019. In terms of relations with Japan, Foreign Minister Motegi held a telephone call with Foreign Minister Philippe Goffin in July, in which they exchanged views on the response to COVID-19 and cooperation in the international arena.

Luxembourg: In May, Prime Minister Abe held a summit telephone call with Prime Minister Xavier Bettel, in which they shared the view to continue rules-based international cooperation on the response to COVID-19. In addition, Prime Minister Bettel expressed his hope that the Olympic and Paralympic Games Tokyo 2020 would show victory over COVID-19, and they shared the view to further develop bilateral relations going forward.

Andorra: In commemoration of the 25th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and Andorra in 2020, Foreign Minister Motegi and Foreign Minister Maria Ubach Font released a joint document on strengthening bilateral relations in December.

Portugal: In August, Prime Minister Abe and Prime Minister António Luís Santos da Costa exchanged messages to commemorate the 160th anniversary of the signing of the Peace, Friendship and Trade Treaty between Portugal and Japan in 2020. In September, Foreign Minister Motegi visited Portugal as a Japanese Foreign Minister for the first time since 2002. Foreign Minister Motegi and Foreign Minister Augusto Ernesto Santos Silva shared the view to further strengthen bilateral relations on the occasion of the 160th anniversary of the Treaty.

Malta: In September, the Embassy of Malta was opened in Tokyo and Ambassador André Spiteri was appointed as the first Maltese Resident Ambassador in Tokyo.

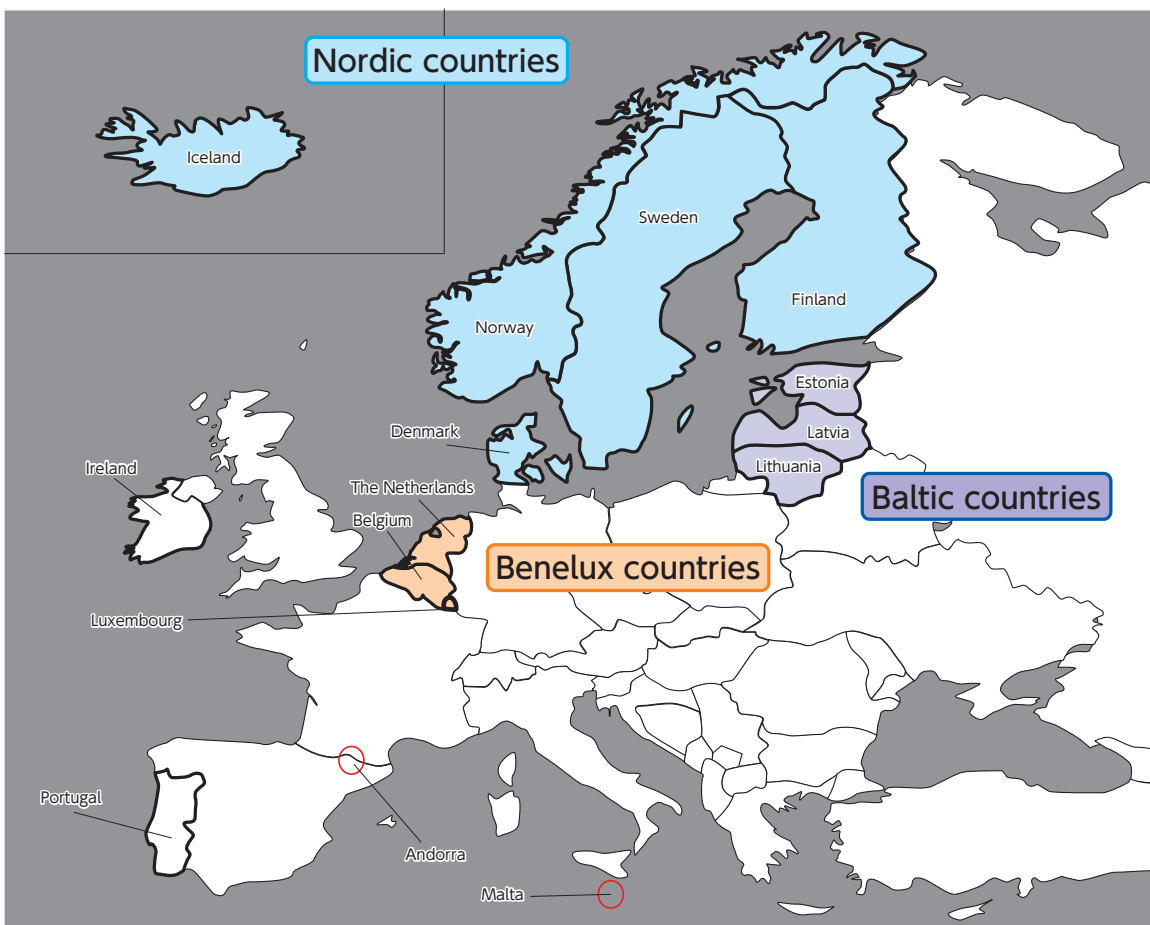
[Baltic countries]

Latvia: Japan and Latvia concurred to hold commemorative events in 2021 to mark the 100 years of friendship between Japan and Latvia.

Lithuania: In commemoration of the 80th anniversary of the activities of former Vice Consul Sugihara Chiune, who saved many lives by issuing visas to Jewish people to pass through Japan, Lithuania designated 2020 as "the year of Chiune Sugihara" and held various commemorative events in cooperation with Japan. On the occasion of the "Beyond Duty - Visas for Life," a high level diplomatic event, held by the Government of Lithuania in Kaunas in September, Foreign Minister Motegi issued a video message expressing his desire to cooperate with the international community to protect a peaceful and prosperous society in the midst of the global spread of COVID-19. The two countries also concurred to hold commemorative events in 2022 to mark the 100th anniversary of friendly bilateral relations.

Estonia: In February, Prime Minister Abe held a summit meeting and dinner banquet with Prime Minister Jüri Ratas during his visit to Japan. They exchanged views on bilateral relations, including strengthening economic relations and cyber cooperation, as well as on cooperation in the international arena and regional situations. A ceremony for the exchange of three memoranda of cooperation between Japanese and Estonian companies was held with the two leaders in attendance. In May, Foreign Minister Motegi held a telephone call with Foreign Minister Urmas Reinsalu, in which they exchanged views on bilateral relations and cooperation in the UN Security Council. In addition, Japan and Estonia concurred to hold commemorative events in 2021 as the 100 years of bilateral friendship.

Ireland: In November, Foreign Minister Motegi held a telephone call with Minister for Foreign Affairs and Defence Simon Coveney, in which they shared the view to closely cooperate in the international arena in light of Ireland becoming a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council in 2021-22. Minister Coveney also expressed his intention to cooperate with Japan in the process of future discussions on the Indo-Pacific in the EU.



[V4]

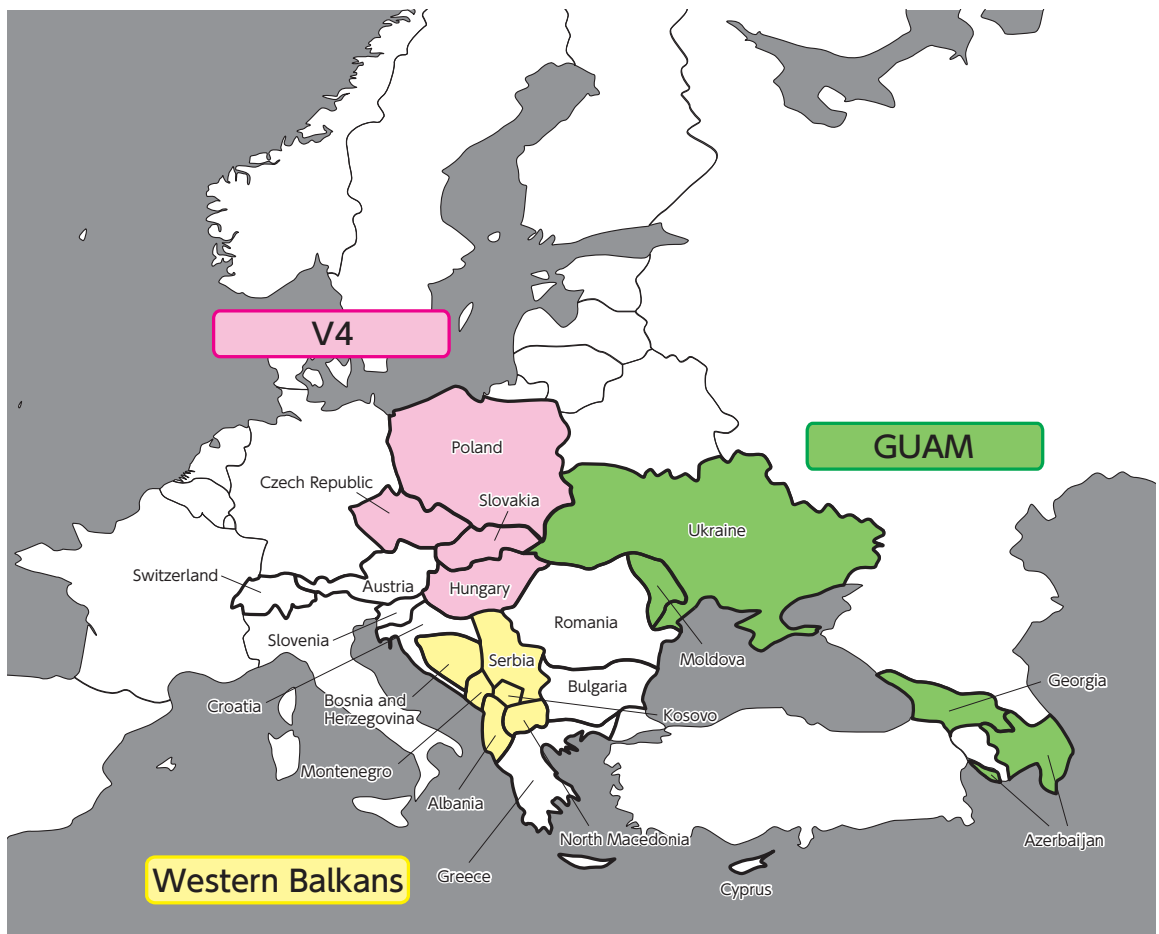
Bilateral relations between Japan and the Visegrád Group (V4) have a long history and are traditionally friendly. Japan places emphasis on its cooperative relationship with the V4 regional cooperative framework of the four countries of Poland, Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech Republic, which share fundamental values and are increasing their presence in Europe against the backdrop of steady economic growth. Japan and the V4 are closely cooperating even amidst the spread of COVID-19 through online seminars and other means.

Poland: In January, Prime Minister Abe held a meeting with Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki, who was visiting Japan. In April, Foreign Minister Motegi held a telephone call with then Foreign Minister Jacek Czaputowicz following the repatriation of about 150 Japanese nationals aboard a chartered Polish Airlines flight amid the spread of COVID-19. Poland assumed the V4 Presidency in July. The year 2020 marked the 100th anniversary of the rescue with Japan's cooperation and arrival in Japan of Polish orphans who had been left behind in Siberia, and related events and publicity were conducted.

Hungary: In May, Foreign Minister Motegi held a telephone call with Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade Péter Szijjártó. They confirmed the significance of Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's visit to Japan in December 2019. They also confirmed their intention to follow-up on matters agreed on in that meeting, thereby steadily advancing bilateral relations.

Slovakia: In 2020, Japan and Slovakia celebrated the 100th anniversary of relations, with various commemorative events were held in both countries (see the Column on page 130).

Czech Republic: The Czech Republic held the V4 Presidency until June. In 2020, Japan and the Czech Republic celebrated the 100th anniversary of bilateral exchanges, with various commemorative events held in both countries (see the Column on page 130).



[The Western Balkans]

Although there still remains ethnic divisiveness, overall progress can be seen for stability and development in the Western Balkan region owing to each country's commitment to reforms toward European integration. Prime Minister Abe visited Serbia in January 2018, the first visit ever by a Japanese Prime Minister. During the visit, he announced the Western Balkans Cooperation Initiative designed to advance cooperation with the Western Balkans (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia), which aims for EU membership. Japan has promoted cooperation with the entire Western Balkan region in areas such as youth and economic exchanges. In February, Japan held the Civil Society Summit in cooperation with the Western Balkans Fund in Albania's capital city of Tirana, with participants from countries throughout the Western Balkans.

[GUAM (Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Moldova)]

GUAM was established by four countries of the former Soviet Union to promote democracy and stable economic development. Japan established the "GUAM+Japan" cooperation framework in 2007. Through holding foreign minister-level and vice-minister-level meetings, as well as theme-based workshops with professionals and experts from GUAM countries invited to Japan, Japan places importance on ensuring that fundamental values take root in the international community through the stability and economic development of GUAM countries.

Ukraine: The Second Japan-Ukraine Cybersecurity Consultations were held in January. President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, who was inaugurated in May 2019, continues to make efforts to resolve the situation concerning eastern Ukraine and the Crimea issue through negotiations in the framework of the Normandy Format and other means. Based on its consistent position of respecting Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, Japan continues to promote bilateral cooperation and support domestic reforms for Ukraine.

Slovenia: Japan-Slovenia relations have gained momentum due to former Foreign Minister Kono's visit to Slovenia in 2019, which was the first by a Japanese foreign minister, and President Borut Pahor's subsequent visit to Japan. Economic relations have also developed in recent years, including the holding of the Japan-Slovenia Business Seminar in Tokyo in February. It is expected that bilateral relations will make further progress toward the 30th anniversary of the establishment of Japan-Slovenia diplomatic relations in 2022.

Romania: A Japan-Romania Foreign Ministers' telephone call was held in October. They confirmed to strengthen cooperation toward the 100th anniversary of the establishment of Japan-Romania diplomatic relations in 2021, as agreed upon during the visit to Japan by President Klaus Iohannis in October 2019.

Bulgaria: Since Prime Minister Abe became the first Japanese Prime Minister to visit Bulgaria in January 2018, there has been an increase in mutual visits by dignitaries in recent years, including reciprocal visits by the foreign ministers and the visit to Japan by President Rumen Radev during the "Triple anniversary" in 2019 (the 110th anniversary of the beginning of bilateral contacts, the 80th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations and the 60th anniversary of the resumption of diplomatic relations). Cooperation under the "Western Balkans Cooperation Initiative" is being advanced.

Croatia: In July, Foreign Minister Motegi held a telephone call with Foreign Minister Gordan Grlić Radman. Foreign Minister Motegi congratulated Croatia on its leadership in holding the EU Presidency in the first half of 2020, and they confirmed to steadily develop bilateral relations, including in the economy field.

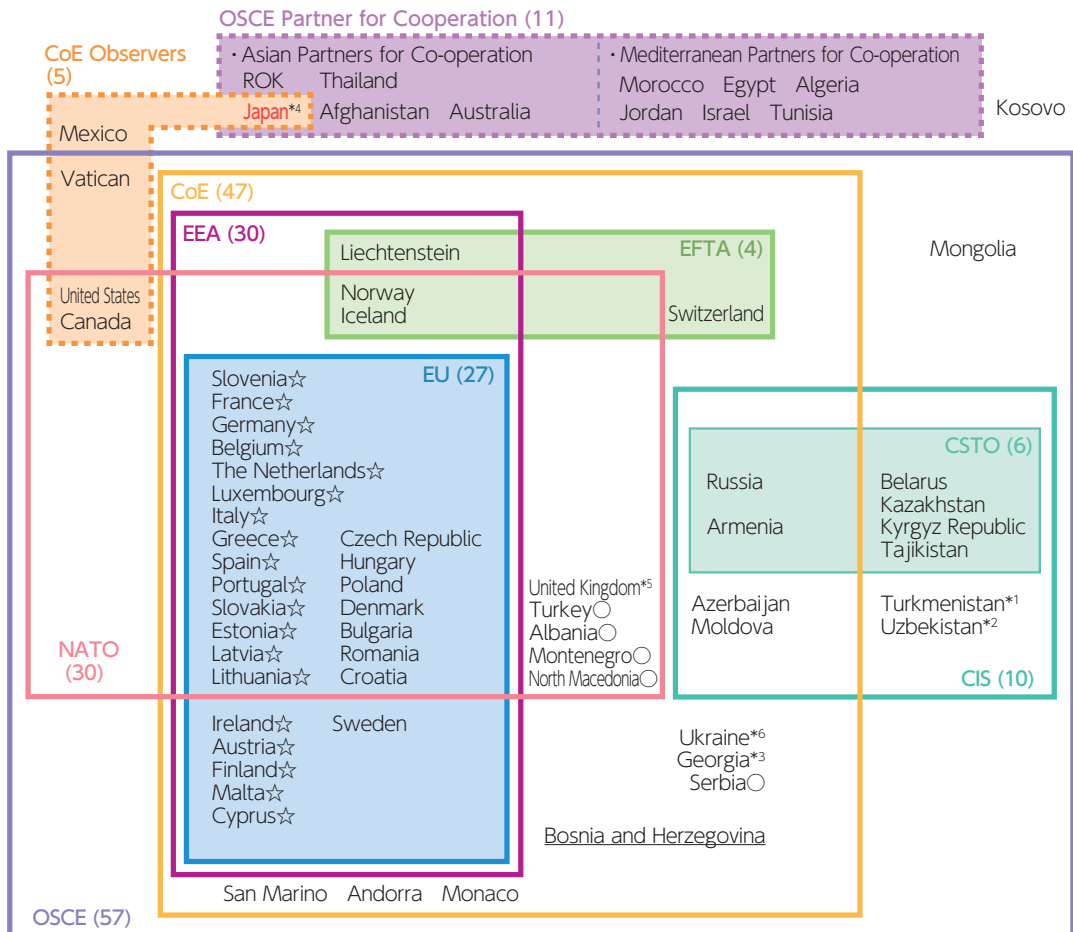
Austria: In September, Prime Minister Abe held a telephone call with Chancellor Sebastian Kurz.

Switzerland: In November, Foreign Minister Motegi held a telephone call with Foreign Minister Ignazio Cassis, in which they agreed to further expand exchanges between Japan and Switzerland on the occasion of the Olympic and Paralympic Games Tokyo 2020.

Greece: In January, State Minister for Foreign Affairs Wakamiya Kenji held a meeting with Deputy Minister for Economic Diplomacy and Openness Kostas Fragogiannis during his visit to Japan, in which they agreed on cooperation for the success of the Olympic and Paralympic Games Tokyo 2020.

Cyprus: Continuing on from the opening of the Embassy of Japan in Cyprus in January 2018, the Embassy of Cyprus in Tokyo was opened. There are expectations for further strengthening of relations toward the 60th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations in 2022.

Major Frameworks of Europe



<Legend> Number of member countries in ()
 ○ : Candidate to be an EU member (5)
 ☆ : Euro member states (19)
 — : Members of the Membership Action Plan (MAP) (2)

*1 Turkmenistan has been an associate member of the CIS since 2005.
 *2 Uzbekistan ceased its membership in the CSTO in 2012.
 *3 Georgia notified the CIS of its decision to leave the organization on August 18, 2012, and formally withdrew from the CIS on August 18, 2009.
 *4 Japan is a partner country of NATO.
 *5 The UK withdrew from the EU on January 31, 2020.
 *6 Ukraine signed a Presidential Decree in April 2018 to withdraw from the CIS.

<Abbreviations>
 CoE (Council of Europe): (47)
 CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States): (10)
 CSTO (Collective Security Treaty Organization): (6)
 EEA (European Economic Area): (30)
 EFTA (European Free Trade Association): (4)
 EU (European Union): (27)
 NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization): (29)
 OSCE (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe): (57)