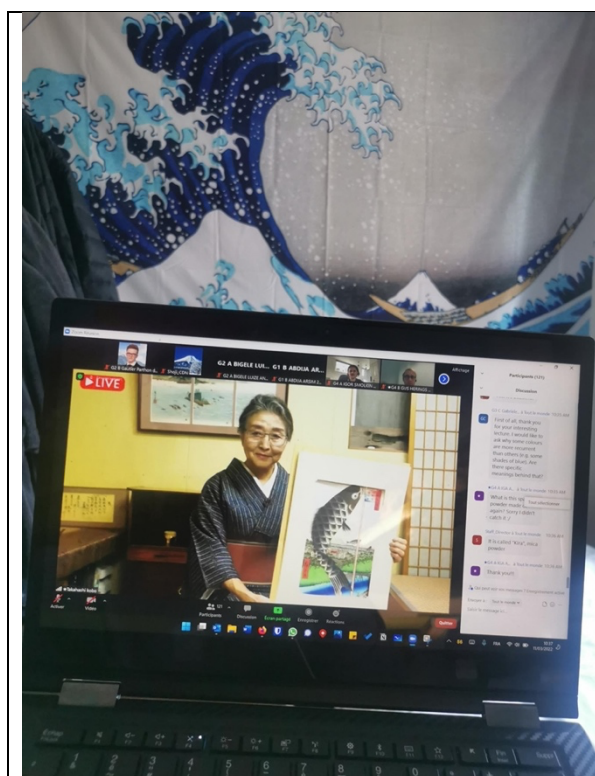


Report on Japan's Friendship Ties Program

Written by	Gautier Parthon de Von
Written for	Embassy of Japan to the Kingdom of Belgium
Program Name	MIRAI, Japan's Friendship Ties Program
Program Stream	Politics and National Security
Program implementation	14-21 February 2023

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, through its diplomatic network, selected young leaders from Europe who they expect to play an active role in international society. I was lucky to be one of the two selected from Belgium in 2023. The Program aims to foster a solid foundation of the relationship between Japan and countries in the regions in the future. A video interview about the MIRAI Program and my participation was made by the College of Europe in Bruges, my alma mater, and posted on [LinkedIn](#) and [Instagram](#).

The program comprises an online component. It included VTC meetings with officials and diplomats, academics, and artistic or cultural experts. There is then a 10-day visit to Tokyo and another Japanese city/region dependent on the Program Stream, implemented by the Japan International Cooperation Center. My field is transatlantic relations specialized in security and defense, and therefore I chose Politics and National Security. I will go into details and describe the different visits I made and learning experiences from this beautiful culture and country.



In the online component of the MIRAI Program, we were introduced to the arts and culture from Japan. In this online session, a Japanese artist from a workshop held for multiple generations describes the process of making ukiyo-e. This art is made on wooden blocks and flourished from the 17th century.

Personally, I found glorious to learn more about such renowned artists as Hokusai's ukiyo-e techniques. This picture was taken in my Residence of the College of Europe, with the Great Wave of Kanagawa in the background. Japan is at the forefront of technology and modernity, while at the same time a beacon of history and tradition. Being able to maintain both tradition and modernity is an inspiring paradox.



The 2023 MIRAI Cohort of young leaders, after their arrival in Tokyo. This picture comprises the members of the Politics and National Security Stream. Its members hailed from 18 countries: Belarus, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Poland, Spain, Sweden, Ukraine, UK. Many friendships last to this day.



At the National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies, we held discussion groups on security and defence with renowned scholars. We exchanged national perspectives on global problems, with a special focus on the Korean Peninsula, and China. Many of the takeaways from these working groups have helped me develop professionally in that field.



Lectures from Japan's top scholars helped us grasp the strategic positioning of the country in a complex security environment. This is important because it helps non-Japanese people understand the priorities and questions that Tokyo faces. This, especially because Europe is so far geographically from the Indo-Pacific region.



A visit to the Miyajima Island allowed us to witness and experience the floating torii gate, Shinto Shrines, and the sacred peaks of Mount Misen. The natural and spiritual beauty of the area is mesmerizing. A hike up the hills, in the middle of a highly forested area, led up to a hidden temple where I was welcomed by monks (pictured in the image below).



Japanese food is one of the most refined and exported in the world. Pictured on this platter is also an origami crane. It is associated to a long-standing Japanese tradition and spirituality. In the hidden temple I went to in Miyajima, a monk gave me an object featuring one thousand cranes senbazuru to burn in a fire. The fire is in the above picture.



I had the chance to visit the Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Forces Etajima Naval Base. Ideally set in a pristine environment, the First Service School and the Officer Candidate School are on the same campus. The school has a great history and long tradition. We had the opportunity to share meals with students on the school's compound, hold working groups, and be provided a lecture from officials. This picture was taken in the Graduation Hall.



Pictured here is the main school building, standing in front of it the MIRAI Politics and National Security Cohort. It was a beautiful sunny day surrounded by the waters of the Naval Academy.



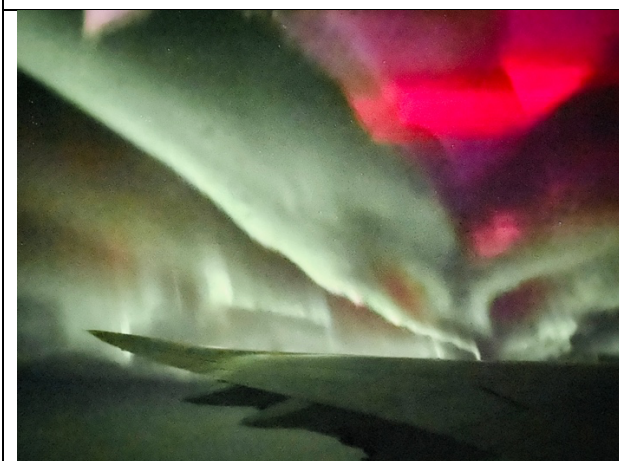
Ink writing is another great and ancestral tradition, and in Hiroshima we had a class to learn how to draw characters. I may share that it looks easy whereas as it is a very fine and delicate art. The teacher was from a family in which they have been doing and teaching ink character writing since over five generations.



MIRAI Fellows standing in front of the Genbaku Dome, a powerful symbol for the protection and safeguarding of world peace, and of the terrible consequences of war and nuclear weapons. It was the only structure standing after the nuclear bomb was dropped on Hiroshima.



One of the final cultural visits, and possibly the finest and most meditative, was to a Japanese garden. Here pictured is a Sakura cherry tree flower blossoming, we were lucky to be there when this natural phenomenon arrives. Such landscape gardening deeply evokes Japan's cultural refinement and care of nature and the environment.



Due to Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine, our plane could not fly over the country, and we had to go over the Arctic. This had the benefit that we were able to witness Northern lights from the plane. The icing on the cake of a memorable trip that took Europe-Japan relations to the next level as we stand in the world for similar values.

"Reflecting on my unforgettable experience with Japan's Friendship Ties Program, I am inspired by the country's ability to maintain both tradition and modernity. From learning about renowned artists to discussing global security issues, every moment was filled with awe and learning. The friendships formed with young leaders from Europe will last a lifetime. Japan's cultural refinement and care for nature left an indelible mark, reminding us of the importance of preserving peace. Truly, this trip elevated Europe-Japan relations to new heights."

Gautier Parthon de Von
2023 Politics and National Security Fellow

----- END REPORT -----