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JapanCoE25 Now and Then

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About yourself.

I have been working as the Director General of Democracy at the Council of Europe since 2012. The Directorate General of Democracy works to help our member states in creating a favourable environment for sustainable democracy and democratic security in Europe.

Three directorates and ten partial agreements are providing guidance, assistance and innovation in the areas of democratic governance, participation and anti-discrimination. My responsibilities include inter alia the policy areas of democratic participation through education, youth and cultural policies, democratic governance at central and local levels, election assistance and civil society, the protection of human dignity, gender equality, children's rights, and the rights of minorities, democratic citizenship and democratic responses to crisis situations. The European Directorate for the Quality of Medicines and Health Care (EDQM) and the Council of Europe Development Bank (CEB) are also part of the DG Democracy.

Previously, I held positions in the Serbian Government including as Minister of Youth and Sports and President of the Fund for Young Talents, Assistant Minister of Defence, Deputy Director in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for Neighbouring Countries.

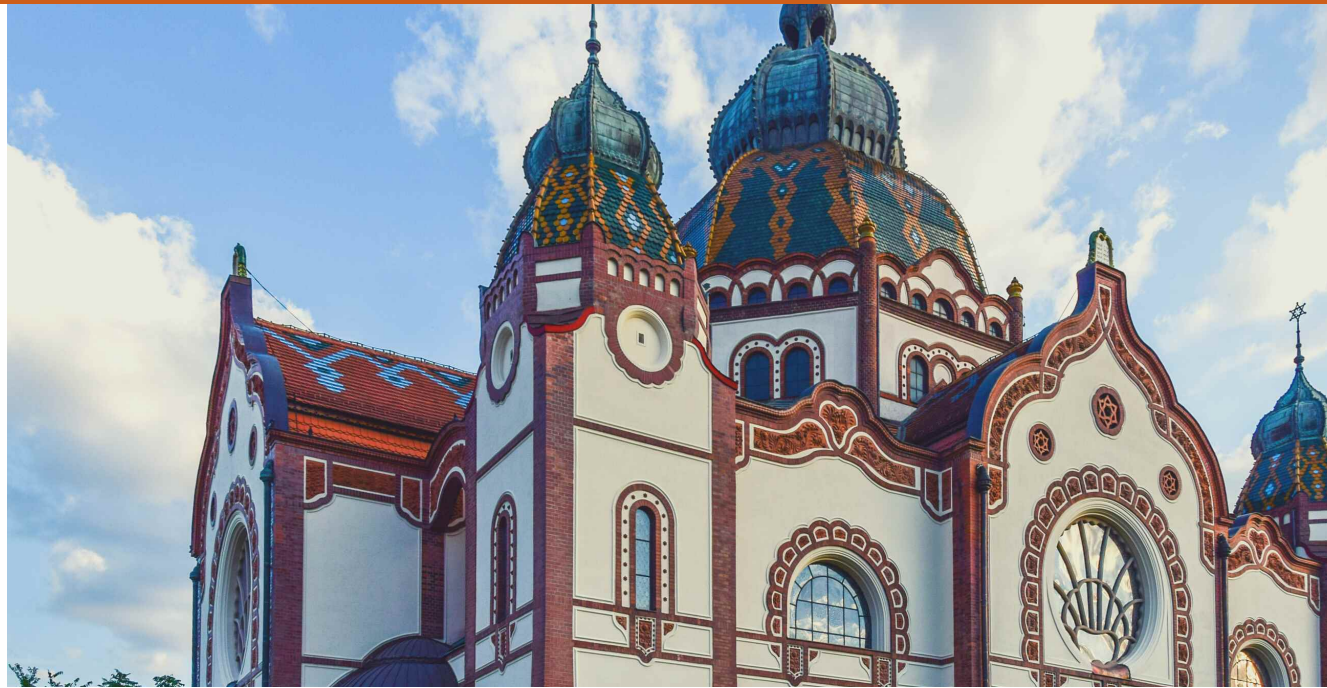


JAPAN & Council of Europe
25 YEARS



NOW AND THEN

**COMPARED TO 25 YEARS AGO,
DID SITUATIONS CHANGE
IN TERMS OF HUMAN RIGHTS,
DEMOCRACY AND THE RULE OF LAW?**



Yes, indeed, it changed a lot. Since 1996 when the Eastern European countries started joining the Council of Europe, the Organisation has worked relentlessly to anticipate and respond to developments as well as threats to human rights, democracy and the rule of law, and create the European standards that the 47 member states will voluntarily respect. To name a few that stem from my Directorate General – the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, better known as the Istanbul Convention, was opened for signature in 2011; the 2010 Strasbourg Declaration on Roma recognised the marginalisation - social and economic - of European Roma, and called for the fight against discrimination, for the promotion of citizenship and for the support of social inclusion. The Council of Europe as a whole has been continuously mobilised to protect the rights, needs and dignity of the most vulnerable, as well as to respond to the new threats to democracy such as the rise of populism or curbing disinformation and hate speech on social media platforms. In the period 2020-21 our priorities have been set around the new challenges arising from the pandemic and their impact on human rights, such as the rise of gender-based violence, inequalities, discrimination, the shrinking of freedom of expression and association, as well as the silencing of journalists. It has been important to reinforce multilateral cooperation in all of these areas.

YOU 25 YEARS AGO

In 1996 I was a visiting scholar in Norway, a country that I would visit again as a diplomat in early 2000s, and which has been a continuous inspiration and in which I discovered strong female politician figures, such as Gro Harlem Brundtland, who through their extraordinary commitment brought important changes to their country. At the same time, this was a difficult period in the Western Balkans region, that however triggered my personal development, a strong sense of values, and my future engagement in the diplomacy and then in the politics of my country of origin, with the desire to see it overcome its problems and prosper into a tolerant and open society.

JAPAN AS AN OBSERVER

**WHAT KIND OF COOPERATION
DO YOU EXPECT FURTHER
BETWEEN COE AND JAPAN
IN THE COMING YEARS?**



In the world of increasing inequalities and threats to democracy, it is important to join forces. The Council of Europe standards are an expression of professional collective knowledge from so many countries, generations and epochs, and as such for me represent the intellectual gold of our civilization. Also, in the view of our shared values, the observer states and other countries see the Council of Europe as providing a comprehensive and complementary platform to achieve their objectives with regard to human rights, democracy and the rule of law. We welcome the announced possibility of Japan's ratification of the Istanbul Convention. As Professor Yoko Hayashi said, if Japan joins the Istanbul Convention as the first Asian country, it will tremendously encourage the Council of Europe. Regarding the upcoming perspectives, the environment is high on the agenda of both Japan and the Council of Europe, as well as curbing disinformation and protecting press freedom, tackling Artificial Intelligence, education and the importance of explaining to the young generation that democracy should not be taken for granted, equal and tolerant sport, youth and children's rights; many are topics for cooperation that Japan has already expressed interest in. Happy 25th anniversary to Japan, and we look forward to joining forces to promote and protect democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

YOU AND JAPAN

When I arrived at the Council of Europe in 2012, one of the first encounters I had was with the Mayor of Hamamatsu, Mr Yasutomo Suzuki, in advance of the Asia-Europe Intercultural City Summit that would take place in Hamamatsu later that year and was organised by the Japan Foundation and the Council of Europe. I invited Mr Suzuki to the World Forum for Democracy in 2016, where he presented the intercultural strategy implemented by his city and formally joined the Council of Europe Intercultural Cities Network, a unique laboratory for local policy innovation, as well as a coalition of cities that stand for pluralism, equity and human rights. Also, I have had a pleasure of meeting Professor Yoko Hayashi whose commitment to the cause of women's rights and gender equality I admire and commend. As a former Minister of Sport and now continuously involved in the further construction and promotion of the Council of Europe sport model, I follow global sports developments and look very much forward to the Tokyo Summer Olympic Games. All this makes me feel close to Japan.