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EUROPE'S STRATEGIC GATEWAY FOR JAPANESE BUSINESSES



Esch-sur-Alzette has become one of Luxembourg's fastest-growing hubs for innovative industries.

In the heart of Europe, land-locked Luxembourg, with a population of only around 681,000 and an area of 2,586.4 square kilometers, offers unmatched advantages to Japanese businesses wanting a presence in the European Union.

Bordered by Germany, Belgium and France, the tiny duchy is the ideal logistics and business hub to the EU.

Because of its history and location, Luxembourg has nurtured a multicultural environment where over half the population is foreign-born. Collaboration across languages and cultures, once a necessity, has become a competitive edge.

In such a setting, Japanese companies find it easier to navigate the complexities of international business, supported by a workforce fluent in English, French, German and Luxembourgish.

"Japan and Luxembourg have always enjoyed excellent relations based on the long-standing friendship between the Japanese imperial house and the grand ducal family. Just this year, Grand Duke Henri visited the country in May, followed by Crown Prince Guillaume in July," said **Japanese Ambassador to Luxembourg Tadahiro Matsubara**.

"Luxembourg is an important partner because we share fundamental values and principles. Our countries are strengthening partnerships across all areas. We have broadened discussions on possible areas for future financial cooperation," he said.

Beyond diplomatic ties, Japanese firms

have also shaped Europe's innovation landscape from Luxembourg.

"When it comes to fintech in Europe, Rakuten Europe Bank is the only fintech arm from here. We have been defining our own business models by collaborating with other companies. And we plan to invest more to scale our business," said **Rakuten Europe Bank CEO Toshihiko Otsuka**.

With its sound governance, transparent institutions and robust legal framework, Luxembourg has long been a magnet for global investors and attracted a new crop of entrepreneurs and innovators.

"We are witnessing Luxembourg's evolution into a metropole where ideas are born, research thrives and transformation begins," said **Esch-sur-Alzette Mayor Christian Weis**.

This commitment to forward-thinking industries is echoed by companies like RSS-Hydro.

"Our mission is to use geospatial modeling and AI (artificial intelligence) to accelerate disaster analysis and climate risk mitigation. We aim to break barriers and deliver real-time insights for better decision-making," said **RSS-Hydro CEO Guy Schumann**.

For entrepreneurs like **Makiko Graf von Oberndorff**, Luxembourg's location and openness are ideal.

"Our goal at House of Japan is to bridge cultures by sharing Japanese tradition, food and products from Luxembourg to the world. We've already secured a license to export sake internationally from here," she said. ■

A CROSS-CULTURAL ENTREPRENEUR WHO BRIDGES TRADITION AND INNOVATION

Makiko Graf von Oberndorff has been promoting Japanese craftsmanship and artistry through events and collaborations with leading local artists, chefs and sommeliers who introduce authentic Japanese products, like sake, tea, crafts and artisanal knives to various markets across Europe.

As president of **Global Link**, von Oberndorff established House of Japan in central Luxembourg as a permanent space to host such events.

Among its first events, **House of Japan** hosted Yokoso, an event organized by the Embassy of Japan, and offered participants a chance to sample premium quality sake and experience Japanese craftsmanship.

Von Oberndorff also serves as the representative director of Naniwa Kin-eki, a 98-year-old Japan-based company that focuses on traditional methods of manufacturing Japanese products.

She has managed to blend tradition and innovation and combine local and global contexts as her distinctive approach to preserving Japanese values and techniques while expanding the global reach of Japanese products, knowledge and cultural identity.

Von Oberndorff goes beyond cultural promotion and product exports. Through House of Japan, she nurtures channels of creative collaboration that appeal to local tastes and aesthetics, while helping to form a deeper and more current understanding



Global Link President Makiko Graf von Oberndorff

of Japanese identity across Europe. ■
<https://www.houseofjapan.lu>



ESCH-SUR-ALZETTE: LUXEMBOURG'S NEW HUB OF INNOVATION

Esch-sur-Alzette in southwestern Luxembourg, has evolved over the past two centuries from a rural town into the country's second-largest city. With around 38,000 residents, Esch's population is projected to exceed 50,000 in the next few years thanks to the rapid development of new districts.

Once the heart of Luxembourg's thriving steel industry, Esch is reinventing itself as a vibrant hub for innovation, research and culture.

"We are in the middle of developing our innovation hub. We are fortunate to host the University of Luxembourg here in Esch. We have some of the most important research centers here and are working on becoming a city of ideas and innovation," said **Mayor Christian Weis**.

Because of its rich history, wealth of modernist 20th-century architecture and culturally diverse population, Esch was

designated by the European Union a European Capital of Culture in 2022, a designation that reignited pride and creativity among its residents.

Weis, the city's youngest mayor in a century, has long-term plans to boost Esch's investment potential and make the city a model of interconnectedness in Europe.

"Together with the Ministry of Economics and the Ministry of Health, we are developing an area dedicated to health-related production and education. We also want to find companies and research centers interested in filling a gap in this area," he said.

"We have that European DNA because Luxembourg knows history and has always managed to get along with the large countries around us. Being a bridge-builder between cities has always been important to us," he explained. ■

<https://esch.lu>

HOW RSS-HYDRO BUILDS CLIMATE RESILIENCE

Although safe from devastating climate-related disasters, Luxembourg has become the newest hotbed for innovation that protects the most disaster-prone countries around the world, thanks to **RSS-Hydro**.

The research and development firm has combined its expertise in geospatial technology and sustainable development to craft solutions that strengthen global resilience against hydro-meteorological threats. It uses drone systems, remote sensing and advanced modeling techniques to provide new approaches in flood risk analysis and disaster preparedness.

"Our mission is to help with geospatial modeling and geospatial intelligence to get much better and faster impact analysis to people and decision-makers, so they can manage disasters and climate risks better. It means we focus very much on speed of delivery and impact," said **founder and CEO Guy Schumann**.

The company's products and services include high-precision 3D flood maps generated through artificial intelligence-driven models, Earth observation-based services to support sustainable management of ecosystem services and development programs and applied hydrologic research in collaboration with academic institutions.

"We have been focusing on 3D visualization to speed up the intake of the information, especially for nonexperts. SafeCity, a product we would like to expand in Japan, allows us to create a complete, high-precision digital twin that will serve as a guide on how to prevent flood disasters," said Schumann, who has



RSS-Hydro founder and CEO Guy Schumann

obtained a doctorate in geography, remote sensing and hydrology. ■
<https://rss-hydro.lu>



Esch-sur-Alzette Mayor Christian Weis