

national day of Bulgaria

A modern state with ancient traditions, a gateway to Europe

Lubomir Todorov
AMBASSADOR OF THE REPUBLIC OF
BULGARIA

Bulgaria is situated at the center of the Balkan Peninsula and has a population of nearly 8 million people. It is known in Japan mainly as the country of healthy yogurt, fragrant roses and sumo wrestler Koto-shu.



Despite its comparatively small area, the country boasts 30,000 monuments of culture, 30 cultural reserves, 160 monasteries and more than 300 museums and galleries.

The oldest processed gold in the world, dating from at

least 4,000 B.C., was discovered in Bulgaria. Our country takes pride in having seven cultural and two natural heritages included on the UNESCO World Heritage list, as well as two intangible heritages on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

Many Japanese know the ancient saying of Confucius "Onko chishin," which can be translated as "Look into the future, learning from the past." Our country, too, standing on its ancient traditions, is looking into the future.

After deep reforms, which Bulgaria started in 1989, we now have a pluralistic democratic political system and functioning market economy.

In recent years our traditionally friendly relations with Japan have gained new substance, quality dynamics and prospects. Today, as a member of NATO and the European Union, Bulgaria shares with Japan the same values and ideals, as well as common positions on major international issues. This provides a stable basis and new opportunities for the deepening and strengthening of our relationship not only on a bilateral basis, but also in the comprehensive framework of the EU-Japan relationship.

Leading the most powerful delegation in the history of bilateral relations, including four ministers and five members of parliament, Bulgarian Prime Minister H.E. Boyko Borissov visited Japan

this January.

This was Borissov's first visit to Asia, which showed the high-level priority of Japan in Bulgaria's foreign policy agenda and gave further impetus to the active cooperation and dialogue between the two states in recent years.

Admittedly, compared to the active political relationship, the economic ties lag behind in terms of the substantial potential for their development. Therefore, further opportunities for cooperation in the fields of renewable energy, green technologies (including electric vehicles), smart-grid technologies, infrastructure, the food industry, etc., were discussed during the visit.

In the 21st century, Bulgaria is an important crossroads not only of cultures, but also for the production and transfer of different goods as well as energy. EU membership and participation in the common market, utilization of EU funds, improvement of the infrastructure as well as favorable business conditions have turned Bulgaria into a gate between Europe and Asia, wide open for potential Asian investors aiming at access to the enormous European market.

Strategic geographical position is important, but this is not our only advantage. Bulgaria offers some of the most favorable business opportunities. The economy is stable and growing, corporate taxes and investment costs are among the lowest in Europe, the labor force is skilled and educated, and the government is making resolute steps to attract foreign com-

panies.

All of the above-mentioned facts predetermine the good business and investment climate that we can provide to foreign investors, including Japanese companies, considering accessing the Bulgarian and the European market. Japan has rendered valuable support to Bulgaria in the transition period and we feel that the time has come to exert more efforts into the development of a mutually beneficial economic relationship.

Bulgaria and Japan have always had strong cultural ties, and the strive for the strengthening of economic and political relations is not

at the expense of cultural exchange. This is evident in the various Bulgarian cultural events held in Japan and the annual Days of Japanese culture in Bulgaria.

I take this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude to all people and organizations in the private sector as well as at the local level, who have contributed to the Bulgarian cultural presence in Japan and the mutual understanding between both nations. Let me express my sincere hope that our common efforts will further deepen and strengthen the traditionally friendly ties between our two nations for the sake of future generations.



Sacred place: Rila Monastery, founded in the 10th century, is a UNESCO World Heritage site. BULGARIAN EMBASSY

Valya Balkanska: cosmic voice from outer space

Valya Balkanska is one of the most famous Bulgarian folk music singers.

She was born in the Rhodope Mountains in southern Bulgaria, known for magnificent natural scenery and as a home to different ethnicities and religions.

The area is also famous for folk music and especially for the Rhodope bagpipe ("gaida").

Valya Balkanska is best known for singing the song "Izlel e Delyu Haidutin," which is part of the Voyager Golden Record selection of music included in the Voyager spacecraft launched in 1977. Voyager has a gold-plated



Valya Balkanska

gramophone record containing the voices, whispers, songs and music of our planet,

including Valya Balkanska's song, as a message from our planet to other possibly existing civilizations in space. Selections from Beethoven, Bach, Mozart and Louis Armstrong are among the music accompanying the Bulgarian song in its 6,000-year-long journey.

In 2002, the president of Bulgaria awarded Valya Balkanska with the highest Bulgarian award, the Stara Planina Orden.

She was also honored by UNESCO as a "citizen of the planet."

Her "cosmic" voice continues to fascinate people in Bulgaria and over the world.

Congratulations

to the People of the Republic of Bulgaria
on the Occasion of Their National Day

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114, V. Levski Blvd. tel.: (+359 2) 946-19-30; 943-30-60
1504 Sofia, Bulgaria fax: (+359 2) 943-44-84

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