

# Bulgaria national day

## Continuing to promote further intensive exchanges

Lubomir Todorov  
AMBASSADOR OF BULGARIA

It is my great privilege and distinct honor on the occasion of the National Day of Bulgaria to express my deepest respect and warmest wishes to Their Imperial Majesties Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko and members of the Imperial family, to the Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda and the Cabinet, and to the friendly people of Japan, with whom we share a long history of friendly relations and cooperation.



A few days before the commemoration of the Great East Japan Earthquake, I would like to once again express our deep feeling of "kizuna" (bonds of friendship) and mention the hundreds of spontaneous concerts, exhibitions and other charity events that took place in Bulgaria. Among the events organized by our embassy in Tokyo was a concert in Higashimatsushima by renowned Bulgarian singer Valya Balkanska, whose song "Izlel e Delyu Haidutin" was recorded on a golden disk and sent by the NASA Voyager spacecraft to outer space in 1977. All these events were just a humble attempt to repay at least some small portion of the assistance that Japan has provided for decades to my country, but Bulgarian people participated with sincere compassion and hope for those who suffered in the disaster-stricken areas.

I really think that now Japanese people are not simply recovering from the disaster. Japanese people managed, with great resilience and huge positive human energy, to transform the consequences of the Great East Japan Earthquake into an opportunity for a quantum leap into new dimensions for the fu-

ture development of Japan, and this unique achievement is followed with great admiration not only by the people of Bulgaria.

In 2011 in Bulgaria we held presidential elections and the inauguration of our new President Rosen Plevneliev took place on Jan. 22 this year. His vision for the foreign policy of the Republic of Bulgaria includes a stronger accent on international economic cooperation and attracting foreign investment, as well as the transformation of the presidential institution into a strategic center for determining the long-term priorities for our development. This will also have a positive impact on further strengthening our bilateral ties with a strategic partner like Japan, with whom Bulgaria, as a member of NATO and the European Union, shares the same values and similar approaches to all major global issues.

In my capacity as the ambassador of Bulgaria to Japan, I am committed to make maximum efforts and further promote intensive political dialogue between our two countries and create new favorable opportunities for comprehensive cooperation. The upcoming visit to Japan



**Holding hands: Initiated by Bulgarian musician Elitsa Todorova (center), 50,000 people will try to set the Guinness World Record for the longest "horo," a traditional dance where people form a chain, on June 9-10 in Varna.** EMBASSY OF BULGARIA



**President of Bulgaria Rosen Plevneliev**

of the speaker of the Bulgarian National Assembly, Tsetska Tsacheva, will continue a series of recent high-level bilateral contacts, including the visit of Their Imperial Highnesses Prince and Princess Akishino to Bulgaria in 2009, a Keidanren delegation in 2010, a presidential visit to Japan in 2009 and the visit of Prime Minister Boyko Borisov in 2011.

Cooperation with Japan is indispensable for the successful realization of the major target of the Bulgarian government to create a sustainable economy,

which is resistant to crisis and natural disasters, and we are involved in talks with Japanese business partners about large-scale economic projects in the fields of infrastructure, green energy, smart grid systems, intelligent housing and others. In addition to the excellent exchanges in the political and business areas, we are happy to see an increasing number of joint projects on the local level between municipalities, universities, schools, non-profit organizations, cultural entities, and expanding exchange in the fields of art, culture, education and sports. More Bulgarian universities have started offering courses taught in the English language, thus providing opportunities for Japanese students to receive an EU member-state diploma, while experiencing the unique Bulgarian culture and delicious cuisine.

Like Japan, Bulgaria is a country with a long history, and we enjoy sharing with Japanese people some of our traditional products and cultural festivities. Bulgarian yogurt has been on the market here for 40 years already, and one of the world's best oil-yielding roses and rose products are well-known in Japan. You can also meet in Japan our famous sumo wrestler Kotooshu, and also Aoiyama. If you want to attend the rose festivals in June that are popular the world over or the July yogurt festival; try our delicious cuisine; visit mountains, the sea, rural areas and spas; or experience our numerous possibilities for skiing, water sports, extreme sports and cultural tourism, all at very attractive prices, you will have to visit Bulgaria. During my assignment here I would like to promote Bulgaria, especially to the younger generation in Japan, through various presentations about my country, as well as through initiating and facilitating exchanges between youths from both coun-

tries in the fields of education, sports, archaeology and art.

Bulgaria and Japan have friendly relations, but the realities of the contemporary world require still more intensive bilateral exchange and cooperation.



**First contact: Lt. Col. Seigo Yamazawa (1846-97) was one of the first official representatives of Japan who visited Bulgaria, in 1877, in his capacity as a military attaché in St. Petersburg, Russia, and an observer of the military operations in the Balkans during the Russo-Turkish War.** EMBASSY OF BULGARIA

## Trifon Zarezan festival shows winemakers' traditions

February is the month when Bulgarians celebrate wine and its patron, Saint Trifon, also known as Trifon Zarezan. For vine-growers and winemakers, the Trifon Zarezan festival has become so popular that it is celebrated both in accordance with the old and the new religious calendars. Over the past 15 years, the Trifon Zarezan festival has been celebrated on Feb. 14, according to the old religious calendar. The fact that Feb. 14 is also St. Valentine's Day has made the date very popular since Bulgarians can choose whether to celebrate wine or love, or both, on the same date.

Trifon Zarezan's day marks the dividing line between the ending of winter and the nearing of spring. The transition between the dead winter season and the invigorating powers of the spring has been the reason for the rituals performed to strengthen and ensure a triumph of vitality and fruitfulness. The first pruning of the vines for the season is the main ritual for the festival, when people gather in the vineyards outside the villages. Only the men can prune the vines, but women get up early in the morning on that day, bake festive bread decorated with dough vines and grapes, roast a hen stuffed with grits, and put all these with a flask of wine in a woolen bag, and see the men to the gate.

Men first go to the holiday church service and then head to the vineyards, taking a musician with them. Every man, when stepping into his vineyard looks at the rising sun and makes the sign of the cross three times. Then he cuts three twigs from three

different vines and washes the cut places with red wine, holy water and ashes from wood burned on Christmas Eve. The pruned twigs are twined into wreaths that men put on their hats, shoulders or flasks, or take home to put in front of a religious icon.

During the festivities, men pick up three live coals from their hearth, which symbolize the invigorating power of the fire and the sun. Looking at the coals, people try to foretell which crops will yield the most abundant harvest in the new season. Having done the pruning, men gather among the vines to eat, drink, sing and dance. In the evening they are guests in the "King's" house. The King is the man who harvested the most grapes and made the best wine the previous year. It is a tradition that the King and his "subjects" must get drunk that evening to secure an abundant harvest in the coming year.

As for the origin of Trifon Zarezan, there are many different folklore versions. A folk legend goes that St. Trifon was born in 225 in Phrygia in Asia Minor. He became famous at age 17 when he cured the daughter of the Roman Emperor Gordian. Unfortunately, Gordian was succeeded by Decius, who persecuted Christians, and in 250, as a devoted Christian, Trifon fell victim to Decius' persecutions. All icons depict St. Trifon with pruning shears in hand, showing him to be honored as a patron of vineyards, one of the main symbols of fertility in Bulgarian folklore culture. Ethnographers are unanimous that St. Trifon's celebrations are a remote reverberation of the ancient festivities for Dionysus, the god of wine.

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**to the People of the Republic of Bulgaria  
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