
Kosovo national day

Countless possibilities in a young nation

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Today, on Feb. 17, all Kosovar citizens are celebrating the sixth anniversary of the declaration of Kosovo's independence. This is a day when Kosovo's people finally realized their long-standing dream of freedom. At the same time, this is a day to pay tribute to those who have sacrificed themselves and contributed to this memorable moment. One can forgive but should never forget. This day, therefore, encourages us to look back on the path we have walked along and to look forward for a brighter future for all of us.

So far, 107 countries around the world have recognized the independence of Kosovo. Friendship between those countries and Kosovo has certainly brought about peace, stability and economic prosperity in the entire Balkan region and across Europe. Japan was among the



very first countries that recognized the Republic of Kosovo and is continuing to provide invaluable assistance to the young country.

Kosovo and its people will be forever grateful to the Japanese people and the international community, who kindly supported the Kosovo people's dream.

Today, the Republic of Kosovo is a member of the most relevant financial organizations, such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and many more regional organizations. Kosovo is stepping up its efforts to become a full-fledged member of the Council of Europe, and most strategically the EU, NATO and the UN, in the foreseeable future.

The declaration of independence is based on the core values of human civilization; freedom, democracy, equality and human dignity. The constitution of the Republic of Kosovo reflects the highest standards of a democratic multiethnic nation. Among 120 seats of the parliament, 20

are reserved for Kosovar Serbs (which accounts for around 5% of Kosovo's population) and other minority representatives (which represent about 3% of Kosovo's population). Besides these seats, minorities will get more seat through the election process as well. This is surely the highest standard in the world in regard to the representation of minorities in parliament.

Equality of all citizens as well as the rule of law and freedom of expression characterizes the fundamentals of Kosovo's society.

Kosovo has also been seeing sustainable economic growth since independence. The government aims to facilitate private sector development and public-private partnerships, which have made Kosovo the fastest growing economy in Europe with an annual GDP growth rate of 5 percent in average over almost 10 years.

Located in the heart of Europe, Kosovo has one of the best business environments. Kosovo's tax rates are as low as 10 percent, its legislation is in full compliance with EU standards, and, at

an average age of 25, its population is the youngest in Europe. As such, Kosovo offers a unique and promising opportunity for international investment. At an initial stage of development, Kosovo simply has a wealth of possibilities.

Kosovo has high expectations for cooperation with Japan in a wide range of fields from education and medicine to manufacturing and tourism. We think highly of Japan's recovery from the ruins of war, which teaches us a great lesson. Japan's advanced knowledge and experience are much needed and greatly appreciated throughout this emerging country.

Also at a grass-roots level, Kosovo people feel a sense of affinity with Japanese people. When the "Stone for Peace" was awarded to Kosovo from Hiroshima last year, Mother Teresa Boulevard in the capital city of Pristina was adorned with Japanese flags. We invite all Japanese people to visit Kosovo, feel the vibrant yet friendly atmosphere and discover its countless possibilities.