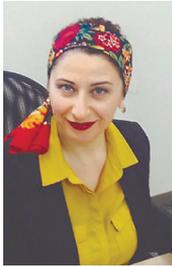

Kosovo National Day

Striving for further economic development

Rudina Bukoshi
CHARGE D'AFFAIRES A.I. OF KOSOVO

Today is the eighth year of Kosovo Independence and I am kindly grateful to The Japan Times for the opportunity to share some Kosovo breeze with the audience of the paper on this very important day for Kosovo. This is a day we remember the sacrifices our people went through and a day our future generations should reflect upon.



On this day, it is also important to reflect on the developments Kosovo has achieved as a new democracy and a new state.

This is a day we celebrate with all our friends all over the world, and among them are Japan and the Japanese people who firmly supported Kosovo and still support it through cooperation in politics, economy, tourism, culture and other areas.

This is the year that will make Kosovo even more pow-

erful, the year in which the state of Kosovo will achieve substantial progress on the path of integration into the EU and NATO.

This is the year of the signing of the Stabilization Association Agreement (SAA) between Kosovo and the European Union.

On Oct. 22, the EU Council approved the SAA and the signing of the SAA took place on Oct. 27, in Strasbourg. The Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo passed the Law on ratification of the SAA on Nov. 2.

I am very confident that this document will serve as the cornerstone of relations between Kosovo and the EU, allowing the building of ties and complementing the conditions for EU membership. This process is very important for us in creating the rule of law, creating conditions for better economic development and economic interconnection with countries of the EU, a market of more than 500 million residents. This is a completely new market, which brings different qualities to our economy and our economic and trade opportunities. It is an agreement that provides us democratization

and involvement for all our citizens, regardless of ethnicity, religion or political orientation, in a united front to our commitment toward the European Union. The spirit of the agreement is the spirit of the citizens of the Republic of Kosovo.

This month the European Parliament gave a positive assessment of the progress in meeting the criteria for visa liberalization, calling to take the necessary action to allow Kosovars to travel without visas in 2016. The government of the Republic of Kosovo considers this a very important step that the European Parliament consented after the recommendation of the European Commission on visa liberalization, as well as the invitation to the European Commission to take such action as soon as possible. We express our pro-found gratitude for the continuous support of the European Parliament for Kosovo.

This year is particularly important as the Kosovo Security Force is preparing to transform into the Kosovo Armed Force, a process that is being done in cooperation with minority communities

within the reconciliation process. This shows the commitment of the government and all institutions of the country in addressing the challenges related to the fight against violent extremism and radicalization that can lead to terrorism. In this regard, the government has made concrete steps such as drafting and adopting the National Strategy to prevent violent extremism and its Action Plan. We are playing a proactive role within the global coalition against terrorism.

Today Kosovo has paved the path, thanks to the unconditional support of our friends, including Japan. The economic development of the country is a high priority. Strengthening the financial system, investing in infrastructure, education and treating our youth as our greatest asset, we are preparing our country for future challenges. Lastly, I would say that Kosovo is still working on creating the best business environment for foreign investment and we encourage Japanese companies to invest and broaden the cooperation between our two countries across a variety of fields such as mining, energy, IT and tourism.