

Bulgaria National Day Special

Dynamic partnership thriving on investment

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On March 3 Bulgaria celebrates its long-sought liberation — it is the day our country reappeared on the European map after five centuries of foreign rule. Upon gaining sovereignty in 1878

Bulgaria embarked on the path of modernization at almost the same time that the Meiji Restoration began in Japan.

Railways and factories were built at a fast pace and in less than 20 years by the end of the 19th century, Bulgaria's economy had grown by more than four times. At the beginning of the 20th century, Bulgarians were referred to by neighboring nations as the “Japanese of Europe,” thanks to their hard work, level of education and humbleness. This comparison was warmly welcomed by Bulgarians, who have always felt respect for and interest in the Japanese people. The geographic distance between our countries was never an obstacle for our official contacts. In 1909 Prince Kuni Kuniyoshi was the first member of the imperial family to visit Bulgaria. He had an audience with Tsar Ferdinand I and was awarded the Grand Cross of the Order of St. Alexander.

We are proud to acknowledge that a noble Japanese man fought for the liberation of Bulgaria. A military correspondent and an officer in the Imperial Japanese Army, Baron Seigo Yamazawa, descendant of a samurai family from the Satsuma domain, took part in the battle for the city of Plevna, which was crucial for the liberation of Bulgaria in 1878.

These stories show the long-standing connections between Bulgaria and Japan and our people, who have nurtured throughout the years mutual understanding and respect.

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the introduction of Bulgarian yogurt to Japan, which has become a symbol of the

friendship between our countries. In 2024 we will celebrate 115 years since our first bilateral contact, 85 since the establishment of diplomatic relations and 65 years since the resumption of diplomatic ties.

The friendly relations between Bulgaria and Japan are manifested through our cooperation across various fields, be they political, economic, cultural or educational. Today, both countries enjoy a dynamic and multilayered partnership that keeps expanding into new areas. Japan is one of Bulgaria's oldest and most important partners in the Asia-Pacific region.

The war in Ukraine, which has caused unjustified human suffering and created unprecedented challenges for global security, demonstrated again that Bulgaria and Japan are like-minded partners who share fundamental values and uphold the principles of international law. In December, the government of Japan announced that it will provide financial assistance through international organizations in Bulgaria to support the 150,000 Ukrainian refugees in Bulgaria.

The Western Balkans is another geographic area where Bulgaria and Japan successfully partner in joint projects for disaster management and support for small and midsize enterprises.

In 2022, delegations from the Invest Bulgaria Agency and Bulgarian Small and Medium Enterprises Promotion Agency visited Japan to strengthen our economic ties. We continue to work toward creating better opportunities for Japanese businesses to set foot in Bulgaria, which can also be their gateway to Europe. A number of Japanese companies have recognized the benefits and potential of Bulgaria's strategic geographic location and skilled workforce, and have set up successful businesses there. In recent years, Bulgaria has attracted high-profile Japanese investments from companies like Yazaki Corp., Sumitomo Electric Industries Ltd. and Sega Corp., with the most recent being a strategic investment by Nidec Elesys Corp., which opened in December its first European research and development center in Sofia for its electric drive division.



The import of Bulgarian food products has also increased, and today a growing number of high-quality Bulgarian foods can be found on the Japanese market.

In 2022, we were able to gradually resume cultural exchanges between our countries with concerts in Japan by world-famous Bulgarian musicians. We are happy to see each year even more active cultural and academic exchanges between our nations. There is a growing interest among Japanese students in Bulgarian language and culture, which are currently being taught at five Japanese universities. Likewise, the number of Bulgarian professionals who specialize in Japanese culture and language keeps growing every year. Educational and scientific collaboration in 2022 was strengthened by the visit of the president of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences for participation in the Science and Technology in Society Forum in Kyoto, and by the signing of new memorandums of understanding between Bulgarian and Japanese universities.

I am confident that standing on the solid foundation of friendship and shared values, the partnership between Bulgaria and Japan will continue to grow stronger.

This content was compiled in collaboration with the embassy. The views expressed here do not necessarily reflect those of the newspaper.



Left: Invest Bulgaria Agency and Japan Institute for Overseas Investment delegates pose with Bulgarian Ambassador Marieta Arabadjieva (fourth from left) at her Tokyo residence in September. Above: Rila Monastery is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. EMBASSY OF BULGARIA

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Congratulations

*to the people of the Republic of Bulgaria
on their National Day*



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