

Croatia national day

Croatia and Japan, beauty-bound countries

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Today we celebrate the National Day of the Republic of Croatia and the 18th anniversary of parliament's proclamation of independence on June 25, 1991, known as Statehood Day.



On this solemn occasion, I am pleased to point out that since last year's Statehood Day, Croatia has made significant progress in many fields. Just to name a few, this April Croatia achieved one of its strategic objectives by becoming a member of NATO. It has successfully carried out the reforms for which it is regarded as a model state for other countries from the region that wish to join NATO and the European Union.

As a nonpermanent member of the U.N. Security Council that actively participates in 13 U.N. peacekeeping operations, as well as in the NATO mission in Afghanistan and the EU missions in Kosovo and Chad, Croatia plays an important role in maintaining international peace and security.

Croatia has also been commended by international experts for its financial stability. Namely, The Banker magazine, published by the Financial Times, bestowed upon Croatian National Bank Gov. Zeljko Rohatinski two awards — the Best Governor of Europe and the Best Central Bank Governor of the World in 2008 — because the measures taken by the Croatian National Bank since 2006, with the aim of curbing loans in Croatia in the context of the world financial crisis, are now viewed as sound and rational. A number of countries that were heavily hit by the crisis are undertaking the same measures as Croatia did years ago.

Unfortunately, we are encountering a setback regarding Slovenia's blocking of Croatia's accession negotiations with the EU because of our northern neighbor's imposed border issue. However, a few years ago, the same bilateral issue did not prevent Slovenia from joining the EU. Moreover, the neighboring state refuses to accept Croatia's proposal to settle this dispute in accordance with international law before the International Court of Justice or to accept the compromise proposal made by the European Commission and the EU Trio (France, the Czech Republic and Sweden), which was accepted by the Croatian Parliament on May 8. It is hoped that we shall soon overcome this

obstacle, which is sending a worrying message to other countries of Southeast Europe that reforms, and the adoption of the *acquis communautaire* are not decisive and sufficient for accession to the EU.

In 2008, we have seen significant development and expansion of good bilateral relations between Croatia and Japan in many spheres, especially in tourism. During the past three years the number of Japanese tourists visiting Croatia has been growing rapidly. Since 2005, the Embassy of Croatia in Japan has been working earnestly to present Croatia as a prime tourist destination that appeals to Japanese people's love of nature and heritage.

The new perception in Japan of Croatia as one of the most attractive tourist destinations is best reflected by the words of Sadakazu Tanigaki, a member of the House of Representatives, former minister of finance and member of the Japan-Croatia Parliamentary League, who on the occasion of Croatian National Day last year in The Daily Yomiuri wrote that "Japan is experiencing a Croatia boom."

In 2008, approximately 145,000 Japanese tourists enjoyed Croatia's hospitality, which is 66 percent more than in 2007, or almost five times more than in 2005. According to the Croatian Bureau of Statistics, Japan was the outbound market that marked the biggest growth in 2008.

It comes as no surprise that Croatia has a reputation of being one of the most beautiful countries in the world. With its seven UNESCO sites, eight national parks, 11 nature parks, the city of Dubrovnik — the "Pearl of the Adriatic" of which Bernard Shaw once said: "Those who seek paradise on Earth should come to Dubrovnik" — and the sapphire-blue sea, which famous oceanographer Jacques Yves Cousteau once described as the world's most beautiful sea, inside out, Croatia is indeed the window to beauty.

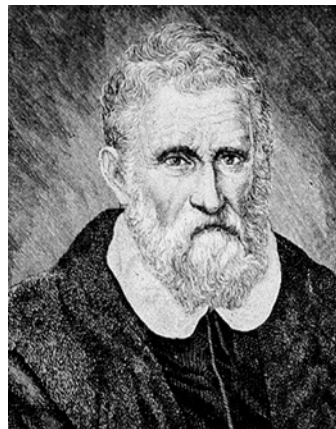
Its rich tradition and heritage, and old medieval cities along the coast make Croatia one of the most coveted tourist destinations in the world, especially for demanding Japanese tourists who cherish the unique combination of nature and the arts.

Apart from tourism as one of the strongest links, Croatia and Japan are connected through some other, perhaps not so evident and widely known, links. For example, Marco Polo, whose family comes from the Croatian island of Korcula, in his book "Il Milione" refers to Japan as Zipangu a "golden land" and writes about the famous temple Konjikido in Hiraizumi.

The book about the lives of the saints, "De Institutione bene vivendi (Concerning exemplary living)," written in 1506 by the father of Croatian literature, Marko Marulic, was the inspiration for the first Japanese book written in Latin script, "romaji," in 1591, "Sanktos-no-gosagyō," compiled by two Jesuit brothers Paul and Vincent.

Another of the links that connects our two nations can be found in poetry. Croatia has the largest number of haiku poets, who frequently win prizes at international haiku competitions. Also, the aria "U boj, u boj (Into the fight)," from the Croatian national opera "Nikola Subic Zrinski," composed by Ivan Zajc, is among the most popular male choir songs in Japan as well as the hallmark of the Kwansai Gakuin Glee Club, the oldest and most famous male choir in Japan. The aria was brought to Japan in 1919, after World War I, by the soldiers that were stranded in Kobe on their way home from Russia's eastern shores, where they spent two months waiting for their ship to be repaired. During that time some members of the Kwansai Gakuin Glee Club were so enchanted by the melody the soldiers sang that it became a permanent piece of the choir's repertoire and concludes each of its public performances.

Japanese fascination with Croatian naive art is yet one more link that speaks of the bonds between Croats and Japanese. Moreover, there are many Croats that are very popular in Japan through sport or music — Ivica Osim, former coach of Japan's national soccer team; Mario Amizic, coach of Japan's na-



World traveler: Marco Polo was born on the Croatian island of Korcula.

tional junior men's table tennis team that won the World Championship in 2006; Mirko Filipovic ("Cro Cop"), the very popular ultimate fighter; and pianists Ivo Pogorelich, Maksim Mrvica and Kemal Gekic have fan clubs in Japan.

There is a city in Niigata in which Croatia is very well known indeed. Love between Tokamachi and my country started during the soccer World Cup in 2002, when the Croatian soccer team stayed in Tokamachi. Since then, every September the city organizes a soccer tournament called the "Croatia Cup." Three years ago, I initiated construction of the Croatian House in Tokamachi, which will be a focal point for the friendship between Croatia and Japan, and where cultural, social and other events will take place. It will be built according to a project by renowned Croatian architects Vinko Penezic and Kresimir Rogina, with funding from the Assembly of Tokamachi.

Tokamachi is the true "Capital of Friendship" between Japan and Croatia. I have nev-



Science pioneer: Nikola Tesla, the great Croatian and world scientist

er met people more in love with my country than the citizens of this idyllic Japanese town in the *kami*-loaded hills and forests of Niigata.

Though Japan and Croatia are geographically far apart, Croatia is nearer to Japan than one might think. In fact, the Port of Rijeka makes Croatia the nearest country to the sites of Japanese investments in Central and Eastern Europe when heading toward them from Japan by sea and through the Suez Canal. Rijeka, as the deepest port in the Adriatic, offers the swiftest way to transport goods from Japan to the production sites of Japanese companies in Central and Eastern Europe. The Gateway Project to develop the port is under way, with the expansion of the Brajdica container terminal and construction of the new Zagreb Pier container terminal, which will have a draft of 17 meters and

an annual capacity of 650,000 TEU.

To maximize the advantages of the Port of Rijeka and to speed up transport to inland destinations, construction of bypass connections from the container terminals to the Rijeka-Zagreb expressway is planned. Also the modernization of the Rijeka-Zagreb-Botovo railway (on the Hungarian border) is about to commence and upon completion the transit time from Rijeka to Botovo will be halved to only five hours.

Croatia offers highly qualified, and above all innovative and creative scientists and researchers. For example, Nikola Tesla, the great Croatian scientist and innovator, is the genius who invented, among other things, the alternating electric current, and set the foundations for wireless communication and transmission of energy. He is becoming regarded as the Leonardo da Vinci of the New Age, with his 750 patents in the field of electricity and magnetism, many of which are untapped but futuristic in outlook. Tesla's successor, young Croatian physicist Marin Soljatic has recently succeeded with his team at MIT in transmitting energy through space. The MIT team led by professor Soljatic generated an electric current between two induction coils two meters apart to light a light bulb.

Highly skilled Croatian engineers were the main reason renowned auto components maker Yazaki set up a center



Jewel of a city: Dubrovnik, often called the "Pearl of the Adriatic" CROATIAN EMBASSY

for research and development in Croatia's capital Zagreb. Also MOL (Mitsui O.S.K. Lines) and NYK (Nippon Yusen Kaisha), the largest shipping companies in the world, are very satisfied with the Croatian captains and officers who hold the most important positions on their ships.

Recently, and partly due to the growing attractiveness of Croatia as a tourist destination, Japanese importers have started to show stronger interest in specific Croatian products, mainly water, wine and olive oil, which are of the highest world quality. Croatian producers SMS, Kutjevo and Bristak participated at the 34th International Food and Beverage Exhibition FOOD-EX JAPAN 2009, and exhibit-

different kinds of jams and spreads, and marinated and salted anchovies.

Also in the renowned Japanese wine guide "World Wines Dictionary — Edition 2009-10," published by Kodansha, one of Japan's leading publishing companies, Croatian wines Klitkun Noire and Chardonnay from the Croatian winery Kutjevo were presented. This is the first time that Croatian wines have found a place in the prestigious guide and we hope that this fact will boost the popularity of Croatian wines among Japanese consumers.

Lastly, let me invite you all to visit Croatia, the land where culture, art and beauty are wrapped together as described in our national anthem, "Our Beautiful One," the first and only world ecological anthem.

Congratulations

on the Occasion of Statehood Day
of the Republic of Croatia



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