

Albania flag day

Partners on the path to peace and prosperity

Bujar Dida
AMBASSADOR OF THE REPUBLIC OF
ALBANIA

On the occasion of Flag Day on Nov. 28, on which Albanian people celebrate their independence, it is my great pleasure as the first Ambassador of Albania to Japan, to extend, on behalf of the President of the Republic, Bamir Topi, Prime Minister Sali Berisha and the Albanian people, our best wishes for peace and prosperity to Their Imperial Majesties Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko, the members of the Imperial family, the government, the wonderful and welcoming Japanese people and to the Albanian community in Japan.



Curiously, both on Nov. 28, Gjergj Kastrioti Skanderbeg, Albanian's national hero, initiated a rebellion against the Ottomans in 1443 and his flag was raised again in 1912 in Vlora by Albanian patriot Ismail Qemali, proclaiming independence from the Ottoman Empire.

Following the collapse of

communism in Central and Eastern Europe, the Albanian people made substantial progress toward democratization and modernization of the political and economic system. On Nov. 28, 1998, the current constitution of the Republic of Albania was adopted, defining Albania as a parliamentary republic with a unicameral legislature. In 2009, Albania became a full member of NATO and completed the final leg of the Stabilization and Association Process to join the European Union. In 20 years of democracy, Albania has made remarkable progress in installing a free market economy.

Albania and Japan have established a special partnership and diplomatic relations since Japan opened its General Consulate in Tirana, Albania's present capital, in 1931. That same year the first economic treaty was signed between the two countries. Albanian and Japanese cooperation spans politics and economics, including exchanges of mutual state visits of parliamentary members, trade, cooperation in the energy sector, in the mining industry, fighting terrorism and or-

ganized crime, and so forth. Last year, Prime Minister Berisha and half of his Cabinet visited Japan, becoming the first head of government to make a state visit in Japan. One of the most important fields of cooperation includes the agricultural sector, which has proven to be one of the most productive and beneficial ones. The Albanian people are grateful to Japan for ongoing support in terms of ODA and several other development projects in infrastructure and education. Today, many Albanian scientists, students and artists visit Japan on generous grants and scholarships awarded by the Japanese government.

Albania has become fully accessible to Japanese people as a new, unexplored tourist destination. In recent years Albanian tourism operators have been present at JATA exhibitions, substantially increasing the presence of Japanese tourists in the ancient and historic cities of Apollonia, Butrint, Gjirokastra and Berat, sites on the World Heritage List protected by UNESCO. Other favorite tourist destinations remain the splendid

virgin beaches and the Albanian Riviera, together with the snowy resorts of the Albanian Alps. Warm and welcoming people together with an exquisite culinary tradition combining elements of Mediterranean and Oriental cuisines have transformed Albania into a new tourist hot spot.

In October 2009, one of the best novels of Albanian contemporary literature, Ismail Kadare's "The General of the Dead Army," was published in Japanese and can be found in every bookstore. Japan Foundation a few years ago promoted "Days of Japanese Culture" in Albania and in addition we have a Haiku Club that has translated, published and presented to the Albanian public the best of Japanese haiku. Japanese readers can learn more about the life and contributions of one of the most prominent Albanians, Nobel Peace Prize winner Mother Teresa, in many books and educational "manga" editions.

I sincerely believe that these events will continue to expand in the future, bringing our countries, our people and our flags closer than ever before.