

Kosovo independence day

Land of young Europeans forges Japan ties

Sami Ukelli
AMBASSADOR OF KOSOVO

On the auspicious occasion of the third anniversary of Kosovo's Independence Day, as the first appointed ambassador of the Republic of Kosovo to Japan, it is my great honor to convey the warmest greetings of the people of Kosovo to Their Imperial Majesties Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko, the government and people of Japan.



I am also delighted to have the opportunity to extend my very first greetings to the distinguished readers of The Japan Times.

On Feb. 17, 2008, three years ago, the elected representatives of the people declared the independence of Kosovo and closed a sad chapter in our

long history of suffering. We celebrate the youngest European country's development as an open, unitary and pluralistic republic, committed to delivering on the promise of democracy for all its citizens, as well as stability in the Balkan region.

With the ruling of the International Court of Justice in July 2010 — the United Nations' highest court — announced by its honorable president, Hisashi Owada, that the declaration of independence did not violate general international law and there was no applicable prohibition, one of the last hurdles fell toward the well-deserved membership in the community of nations.

Kosovo is passing through a historic period of state consolidation and the preparation of its institutions to confront successfully the challenges deriving from the integration process toward joining the Euro-

pean Union. Its institutions are devoted to continuing efforts to build a secure and prosperous future for all of Kosovo's citizens, and thus further develop a fully functioning, democratic and multiethnic state that is able to achieve its Euro-Atlantic aspirations.

There are a number of challenges ahead, but the country is fully aware of them and making efforts in the right direction.

As a member of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, and hopefully soon of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, Kosovo marks an average of 5 percent annual growth in gross domestic product (GDP) — one of the highest in Europe — in spite of the global economic crisis.

Kosovo's greatest unexploited treasure and challenge is its youth: with 75 percent of the population under 35 years old, it is among the youngest in Europe. With investments in infrastructure as an emerging economy, it is preparing the ground for major investors to come and hopefully set out on a path of balanced and sustainable development, which can generate openings for the youth entering the job market.

Japan-Kosovo ties

The recognition of the independence of Kosovo, and the establishment of diplomatic relations in 2009 has laid the foundation for friendly and cooperative future relations between Japan and Kosovo.

Japan is a fascinating country that has shown its commitment to Kosovo in the past

through multilateral channels, through international organizations. This contribution has continued and has been extended after establishing bilateral relations. It is Kosovo's sincere desire to actively consolidate and expand these relations at various levels: in political, economic, cultural and academic exchange.

We are very appreciative for all the support we have received and receive in different ways, be it through Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) training of our government officials, expert knowledge or expertise in waste management or support of grassroots activities.

I hope that gaining a personal acquaintance with my country will help in strengthening this relationship. There is no better way to enhance the level of cooperation than with people-to-people contacts.

Last year with four special concerts by the Kosovo Philharmonic Orchestra throughout Japan we marked the first anniversary of diplomatic and cultural relations between Japan and Kosovo. Aware of the sad recent history of war and destruction in Kosovo, with the theme "A prayer for peace," our people wished to send the message to everyone that our young, friendly and independent people aspire to start over, and direct their efforts to strengthening peace and stability in the Balkan region, and moreover throughout the world.

The concerts were so successful, each playing to full houses. More than 6,000 people attended the concerts and lis-

tened not only to Mozart's Requiem but also to original pieces by our composers.

On this special occasion, I take this opportunity to express my sincere appreciation to our Japanese friends in Kosovo, friends of Kosovo residing in Japan and Japanese people for the continuous support to our country, and to our newly established embassy.

I would like to reiterate in my capacity as ambassador of Kosovo to Japan my commitment to contribute to further developing and strengthening the cooperation and friendly relations for the mutual benefit of both our countries, and thus to stability and peace in the world.

Unleashing vibrant Kosovo's tourism potential

Kosovo presents a rich ethnocultural, material and spiritual heritage treasure house of different historical periods. With their unique characteristics, features and qualities, each culture has contributed its diverse values to the cultural heritage of Kosovo.

However, the slogan of the country, "Kosovo, The Young Europeans," turns the spotlight on the people and human spirit, rather than the country's natural marvels and history.

With this very strong and confident statement the aim is to attract a wide range of audiences, from politicians to businessmen, from tourists to donors. All will sense the future potential of the young nation and the positive attitude.

A unique demonstration of



Multicultural: The former Turkish bath in the center of Prizren KOSOVO EMBASSY

the cultural diversity within Kosovo is especially manifested in the southern and western parts of the country, including the Dukagjin region, and the towns of Peja, Gjakova and Prizren. The small fortresses such as the Albanian "kullas," mills and bridges, the mosques, Catholic and Orthodox churches, Turkish baths, castles and archaeological settlements present a rich ethnocultural, material and spiritual heritage treasure house of various historical periods.

Recently, the number of Japanese tourists visiting Kosovo has been increasing slowly, but steadily. The first tours to Kosovo have been introduced to Japanese by travel agencies and the feedback from the participants is very encouraging —

there seems to be a great unexplored potential of tourists interested in visiting our beautiful country.

Pristina is the world's newest capital, a surprisingly cosmopolitan city with a youthful vibrancy amid landmarks recalling the rich ebb and flow of Balkan history. Especially magnificent are the touristic regions of the Albanian Alps (Bjeshket e Nemuna) and the Sharr Mountains.

Among the many natural attractions of Kosovo are the Gadime Cave, the Spring of Drini i Bardhe, the Mirusha waterfalls, Rugova Gorge, Decan Gorge, the beautiful natural and artificial lakes or thermomineral hot springs. The Rahovec region has just started its mission to become Kosovo's "Wine Tourism Destination."

Kosovo has a long tradition in viticulture. With its special scenic features and the variety of wineries — ranging from small family wineries to large enterprises — the region offers a unique experience and excellent value for money. The Sharr Mountains in the very south, bordering Macedonia and Albania, offer excellent tourism opportunities, such as skiing, ecotourism, paragliding, mountain biking, rock climbing, trekking or horse riding.



Symbol: The 6,000-year-old statue Hynesha ne Fron (goddess on a throne) is Kosovo's trademark archaeological find and mascot.

If you are looking for souvenirs, handicrafts in Kosovo have a long tradition. Many cities in Kosovo are well known for filigree work, silver, copper, ceramics and wood crafts. Local cuisine, pastries, meat recipes and other specialties influenced by the Orient, paired with wine from local vineyards, will round off your successful expedition to the youngest country in the world.

Congratulations on the Third Anniversary of Independence Day of the Republic of Kosovo



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