

Albania flag day

A day to remember for all Albanians, evoked in the national flag

Bujar Dida
AMBASSADOR OF ALBANIA

Every Nov. 28, is a day of celebrations for all Albanian people, a day to reflect on our long history and also to think of the challenges that lay ahead of us in the future. On this festive day, it is my distinguished pleasure as ambassador of the Republic of Albania to Japan, to extend on behalf of the government and the Albanian people, the best wishes for health, peace and prosperity to Their Imperial Majesties Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko, the government of Japan, the welcoming Japanese people and to the Albanian community in Japan. I am particularly honored today to address all readers of The Japan Times and share with them some of my thoughts regarding the level of bilateral relations between Albania and Japan, marking 89 years of our diplomatic relations.



time in history, the Albanian people united under one flag, a red banner with a black bicephalous eagle on top, and started their armed resistance against the Ottoman Empire. Following the ideals of the Albanian Renaissance of the 19th century, again on Nov. 28 (1912) Albania became an independent country. For every Albanian, Nov. 28 not only represents a day of national pride, but also it highlights a special connection we have with our flag and the eagles in particular, a bird greatly revered in our culture, folklore and arts.

Firstly, I would like to express one more time the heartfelt condolences to the people of the Tohoku region, who faced on March 11 one of the biggest natural disasters in history. The prayers and thoughts of the Albanian people rest with the victims and their families. And yet, it was the determination and unparalleled resilience of the Japanese people, who did not succumb to the extreme difficulties, but managed to overcome the worst. From my visit to the Tohoku area, I noticed not only the wreckages of the devastation



National hero: George Kastrioti Skanderbeg (1405-1468) is the most important figure of the Albanian National Awakening.

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caused by the tsunami, but also signs of hope. It was a source of true inspiration to see that people have started a new life and things were settling in the daily routines.

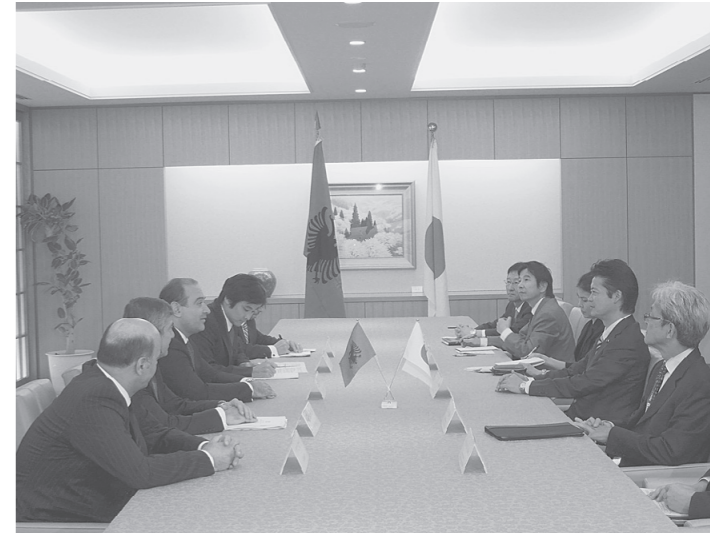
On Nov. 21, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Edmond Haxhinasto visited Japan, increasing the level

of political dialogue between our countries. He met with his counterpart, Koichiro Genba, members of the Albania-Japan Parliamentary Friendship Association and other dignitaries. During the visit Mr. Haxhinasto emphasized the very good relations that exist between our countries, not only in bilateral terms but also

in successful multilateral collaboration through international organization, such as the United Nations. Albania would like to deepen the economic exchanges and encourage further cooperation in the fields of investment and education. In addition, Mr. Haxhinasto reiterated on behalf of the Albanian people the condolences for the catastrophe that hit Japan and the willingness of the government of Albania to offer help.

The relationship between Albania and Japan is in the 89th year since the establishment of the diplomatic relations and the overall bilateral relationship is profound and includes cooperation in area as diverse as politics, security, economy, trade, agriculture, tourism, culture and sports. Special emphasis is put on the energy sector, mining industry and tourism. Promotion of tourism remains a priority of the Albanian government. Substantial investment in roads and highways, major improvements in accommodation facilities, increased lodging capacity and the colorful mosaic of Albanian landscapes have re-

sulted not only in the inclusion of Albania as the top destination for 2011 by Lonely Planet but de facto increased dramatically the number of tourists in 2011. Virgin beaches, evergreen pine forests, breathtaking lakes, the Alps, rare wildlife, UNESCO-protected sites, traditional cuisine are but few of what Albania has to offer to visitors. During the JATA World Tourism Congress and Travel Fair, the Japanese public was introduced by Albanian agencies to a wide range of tours and opportunities to visit Albania, the last mystery of Europe. It is expected that the number of Japanese tourists will noticeably increase, considering Albania's favorable position as a regional hub and our cultural heritage. Major touristic attractions remain the three UNESCO World Heritage sites of Butrinti, Berati and Gjirokastra. Very typical of these three places, besides the very good large-scale preservation of historical monuments, is their strong relation to major historical developments in the Byzantine and Roman empires, while Gjirokastra is regarded as a fascinating city carved out of



Strengthening ties: Edmond Haxhinasto, deputy prime minister and minister of foreign affairs of Albania, meets with Foreign Minister Koichiro Genba on Nov. 21 in Tokyo during his visit to Japan. EMBASSY OF ALBANIA

stone.

Looking toward such optimistic development and the favorable business climate, we strongly believe that the conditions are ripe for major direct investments from Japanese companies in all upcoming sectors of the economy. Japanese citizens can travel freely to Albania, without visas, and we have seen an increased number of tourists and business travelers from Albania to

Japan. Albanian citizens are learning the Japanese language and showing consistent interest in cultural and social trends. At this point, I can proudly conclude that the bridge between our countries has been built; it should be the goal of future generations to strengthen and solidify it so that ideas, goods and values can move freely, in tandem with the best aspirations of peace and friendship.

Congratulations to the People of the Republic of Albania on the Occasion of The Flag Day

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