

Lithuania National Day

Shared humanitarian values shape relations

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The courage of Lithuanians to persist is greatly empowered by those who offer support and share the sentiments and values we ourselves hold. That is why the close friendship with Japan is so important to Lithuania as we celebrate the centenary of the restoration of our statehood. I am delighted to extend, on behalf of Lithuania's government and the people, our most sincere greetings to Their Majesties Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko, the Imperial family, the government and the Japanese people.

When a century ago, on Feb. 16, 1918, the Council of Lithuania proclaimed the Act of the Restoration of Lithuania's Independence, the courage to be free was stronger than the might of those occupying the country. The courage to be free also gave strength and hope to the fighters for Lithuania's independence during the oppressive years of the postwar Soviet occupation. Their successful struggle culminated in the second restoration of national independence on March 11, 1990, even as Soviet army tanks were still patrolling the country attempting to frighten our people.

Solidarity of the European nations in our region as a collective driving force led us to freedom. The empathy and support, however, extended beyond our neighborhood courageously striving to break free from the grip of occupation. Kuji, Iwate Prefecture, the Japanese sister city of our port city Klaipeda, was a faraway partner that stood proudly

beside our aspirations of persevering the Soviet threats and blockade, forced upon our nation after the restoration of independence in 1990. The mayor of Kuji wrote to Mikhail Gorbachev of the USSR in protest of the Soviet violence unleashed against peaceful civilians in the streets across Lithuania following the tragic events and deaths on Jan. 13, 1991. Kuji then continued to offer much needed support to Klaipeda during the blockade that same year and delivered humanitarian aid to hospitals. Lithuania, although on the opposite side of the Earth, felt the encouraging support of Japan.

It is a reoccurring tendency to share humanitarian values with the Land of the Rising Sun. We often think and speak of a Japanese diplomat Chiune Sugihara who was posted to Lithuania as the vice-consul between 1939 and 1940. As history was teaching the world some very severe lessons, Sugihara resisted official orders and issued some 6,000 transit visas to the Jews fleeing the horrors of the Holocaust during World War II; he was risking his job and the lives of his family. The first point of arrival of the Jewish refugees was Tsuruga, Fukui Prefecture, symbolizing our commitment to safeguarding the principles of partnership and humanity.

Today we stand proud of our heritage and the struggle for freedom. We fiercely advocate for democracy, cooperation and peace. Our young people — highly educated, technically advanced, multilingual and raised with democratic values — are our first generation of not only modern Europeans, but also citizens of the world. Today, we are active contributors to trans-Atlantic and global security. The recent official visit of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to Lithuania demonstrated that we have many mutual priorities, including the use of diplomacy to respond to threats, investment in technologies, exchanging education

experiences and encouraging people-to-people contacts. Although we as nations have walked very different paths to achieve all that we have, this makes us great and knowledgeable allies.

Lithuania has achieved great success in recent decades. We experienced a breathtaking transition from a planning economy to a flourishing market economy of biotechnology, gene engineering and world-class laser developments. Lithuania also likes to be connected — we have the fastest globally public Wi-Fi, eighth-fastest mobile internet and the highest internet bandwidth in Central and Eastern Europe. As one of the dynamic "Baltic Tigers," Lithuania is open for business and investment. Lithuanians indeed are passionate and motivated competitors. We appreciate very much that leading up to the exciting 2020 Olympic Games in Tokyo our athletes will have an opportunity to prepare themselves and train in Hiratsuka, Kanagawa Prefecture.

As a land that has historically advocated for tolerance and diversity, Lithuania encourages differences. We take great pride in our cultural exchanges and the Japanese interest in the Lithuanian arts and its rich heritage. We have benefited immensely from the Japanese investments into preserving the memory of our great multitalented artist Mikalojus Konstantinas Ciurlionis, one of the pioneers of abstract art in Europe, fusing painting and music into a unique artistic formula. Many museums and other cultural institutions in Lithuania have also received important attention from Japan. This gives us an incentive to continue introducing our culture and creative legacy of many generations to the world.

As we are looking into the future, it is clear that both our countries have unresolved challenges ahead. In the age of elevated connectivity, there is always a danger of getting



distracted, turning our focus away from priorities. Having robust partners means that we never have to stand alone, be it cyber, military or nuclear threats, media deceit or masked aggression of those who let their ambitions go beyond the responsibility to the world. My country will continue to stand its ground, refusing to conform to the culture of scare tactics, hybrid warfare or open violence.

As Lithuania is stepping into the second century of its modern statehood among a group of faithful allies, we stay committed to the promises and responsibilities as a member of the international community, regional and international alliances and as fierce believers in democracy.

Top: Vilnius, the capital of Lithuania, boasts a blend of historic and modern features. Bottom: The historic center of Vilnius has been designated as a UNESCO World Heritage site.

LITHUANIAN TOURISM DEPARTMENT

*Congratulations
to the People of the Republic of Lithuania
on the 100th Anniversary of Their National Day*



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**Congratulations
to the People of Lithuania
on the Occasion of
Their National Day**

**Mr. Chiune Sugihara is
remembered for his deep
connection to Gifu**



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