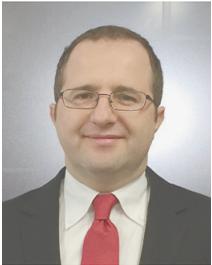


Kosovo National Day Special

Fostering ties through mutual cooperation

Leon Malazogu
AMBASSADOR OF KOSOVO



Eleven years ago, the Republic of Kosovo declared its independence, standing as a major contributor to regional security and an avid fan of democracy among the community of nations. A week later,

on Feb. 25, we will mark the 10th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Kosovo and Japan.

On these special milestones, it is my great honor, on behalf of His Excellency President Hashim Thaci and the people of Kosovo, to convey our warmest greetings and respect to Their Imperial Majesties Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko, His Excellency Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and the people of Japan.

It is a great privilege to represent my coun-

try in Japan, our most reliable ally in Asia. Kosovo opened its embassy in Tokyo only two years after its declaration of independence, and Tokyo is one of our key and growing diplomatic outposts covering a wider part of the Asia-Pacific region.

Kosovo and Japan have had formal ties for only 10 years, but our relations go further back. Japan spoke out against the ethnic cleansing that was unfolding during the '90s and has supported Kosovo since its independence politically and with generous assistance. Kosovo appreciates the support, and the Japan International Cooperation Agency alumni are joined by many Kosovars to mark the Day of Japanese Culture twice a year in two cities.

It is great news that Japan is paying more attention to the Western Balkans; Kosovo is a beacon of free market and liberal values in this troubled region.

Having been in Japan for over two years, I have noticed similarities. The concept of *kizuna* is similar to our *besa* (strong vow), which must be kept at all costs to avoid disgrace, enabling personal trust as strong as

super glue and creating greater predictability in business, politics and day-to-day affairs.

Honor, loyalty and rectitude are major tenets of Bushido and the Code of Leke Dukagjini that governed Kosovo and northern Albania during the Middle Ages. The philosophy behind the two codes has enabled generations of Japanese and Kosovar warriors to defend and define their nations.

Like-mindedness in foreign policy can also help Kosovo and Japan jointly work together for a better world that is well-regulated and where nations inclusively address all global ills.

Kosovo will also cooperate with the city of Sanjo, which will host Kosovar athletes for the 2020 Olympic Games.

Many Japanese have noticed our success in judo and the gold medal that Kosovo won at the 2016 Rio Olympics, but Kosovars have won medals at earlier Olympic Games under the banner of former Yugoslavia. Unfortunately, as an oppressed nation our legacy and ancient history is not nearly as well-known. Kosovo is a new country, but part of a very old nation that is seeking wider recognition and support.

A Japanese investor has already made Kosovo home to a large shiitake factory and more Japanese investments are in the pipeline. Low taxes exempting dividends, use of the Euro, a stable banking system, rapidly improving transportation infrastructure, as well as labor skills and safety are just several reasons why Kosovo also works closely with Germany, Switzerland and Turkey, some of its most important economic partners.

Every year, Kosovo is improving its standing in various global rankings — from gross domestic product growth, broadband internet access and media, we are quickly closing the gap with our neighbors and harmonizing our legislation with the European Union.

This year is busy for both Japan and us as we begin with a concert and reception to celebrate the first visit from the chairman of the Assembly of Kosovo, who will visit Japan as we open parliamentary exchange as a new avenue of cooperation.

This content was compiled in collaboration with the embassy. The views expressed here do not necessarily reflect those of the newspaper.