

Bulgaria National Day Special

Forging a strategic partnership for the future

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AMBASSADOR OF BULGARIA



On March 3, Bulgaria commemorates the restoration of its statehood in 1878, when it embarked on the path of modernization at almost the same time that the Meiji Restoration

began in Japan. For more than 100 years, Bulgaria and Japan have been building relations of strong friendship, mutual respect and cooperation.

Against this rich historical backdrop, 2025 proved to be a particularly meaningful year for Bulgaria-Japan relations. Fifty-five years after Bulgaria's participation in the first Osaka Expo in 1970, which introduced Bulgarian yogurt to Japan and strengthened bilateral relations, we again welcomed our Japanese friends to our pavilion at the 2025 Osaka Expo.

Hundreds of thousands of people participated in an immersive audiovisual experience that showcased Bulgaria's treasures, innovations and talented people. We were also deeply honored to welcome Her Imperial Highness Princess Takamado at our pavilion. As the crowning achievement, our official mascot, Lactochan, was awarded first prize at the World Expolympics, further highlighting Bulgaria's vibrant presence at the event.

Last year was one of intensified political exchanges with 11 bilateral visits in both directions on the governmental and parliamentary levels. H.E. the President of the Republic of Bulgaria Rumen Radev visited Japan from May 17 to 21 for Bulgaria's National Day at the expo on May 18. Radev was received in audience by His Majesty Emperor Naruhito. He also held a meeting with H.E. then-Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba at which they jointly signed a declaration on establishing a strategic partnership — a key document that will shape our deeper cooperation in the coming years in

the areas of security and global issues, the economy and business, research and innovation, culture, education and people-to-people exchanges.

Business relations also gained momentum. Our collaboration with the trade ministry and the Japan External Trade Organization was reinforced by exchanging business delegations and holding business forums in Tokyo and Sofia. Representatives of many Bulgarian small and midsize enterprises participated in the expo as well as other specialized fairs in Japan. Bulgarian manufacturers of satellites and drones are setting up bases in Japan. Cooperation in the energy sector is also robust, with important projects being discussed between our governments.

On Jan. 1, 2025, Bulgaria became a full member of the Schengen Area. On Jan. 1 this year, Bulgaria joined the eurozone, adopting the euro as its national currency. These historic steps not only mark the completion of Bulgaria's full integration into the European Union, but also send a strong signal for macroeconomic stability and regulatory convergence, increasing the nation's attractiveness for investment and technological cooperation.

As Bulgaria's economy continues to grow at an average annual rate of around 3%, some of the fastest growing sectors are information technology, artificial intelligence and the creative industries. This is well recognized by Japanese companies and many of them already operate in Bulgaria in the areas of digital transformation and clean energy.

Furthermore, Bulgaria and Japan are expanding scientific cooperation. Insait, our leading AI institute, partners with Riken and Toyota. Another concrete example is the conclusion in 2025 of a memorandum of cooperation in AI and big data research between Bulgaria's Gate Institute and the University of Tokyo, the University of Tsukuba and Kwansei Gakuin University.

Bulgarian and Japanese people have always shown a deep interest in each other's culture and traditions. Recent years have added even more collaborations to



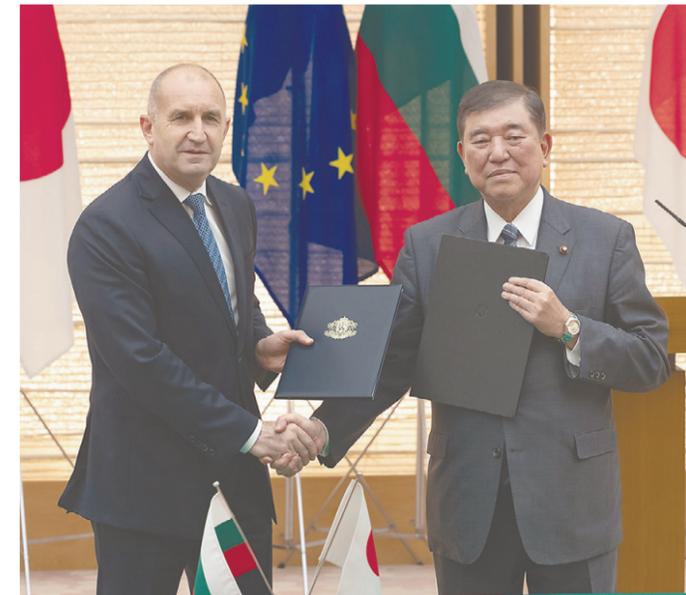
the already rich fabric of our cultural and people-to-people exchanges. The Bulgarian Martenitsa Festival held on March 1 has become a cherished annual tradition, attracting numerous visitors each year to Miyashita Park in Tokyo's Shibuya Ward.

Educational exchanges are also flourishing with the increase in Bulgarians studying Japanese and Japanese studying Bulgarian. Bulgarian language and Bulgaria-related subjects are currently taught at five leading Japanese universities. Many talented students participate in the annual Japanese Language Speech Contest in Bulgaria and the Bulgarian Language Speech Contest held in Japan.

The strategic partnership between Bulgaria and Japan stands on a firm foundation of trust, shared democratic values and a common vision for stability, prosperity and the rule of law.

As Japan's Free and Open Indo-Pacific initiative marks its 10th anniversary, the interconnectedness between the security of Europe and the Indo-Pacific underscores the significance of fostering closer cooperation that reflects not only the maturity of our friendship, but also our joint determination to shape the future together.

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



Far left: People dance at the Bulgarian Martenitsa Festival at Miyashita Park in Tokyo's Shibuya Ward.

Left: President Rumen Radev and then-Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba pose after signing a declaration formalizing a strategic partnership between Bulgaria and Japan, on May 20, 2025.

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BULGARIA

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Congratulations

*to the people of the Republic of Bulgaria
on their National Day*



Meiji Co., Ltd.