

Georgia independence day

Despite various challenges, remarkable progress

Revaz Beshidze
AMBASSADOR OF GEORGIA

On the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the restoration of independence to Georgia, I take the opportunity to extend my warm, respectful greetings to Their Imperial Majesties Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko, as well as to the government



and people of Japan. I would like to express my warm greetings to the small Georgian community resident in Japan for their courage and sense of unity over the past months.

The tragic aftermath of the March 11 earthquake and tsunami that claimed the lives of many innocent people has struck the hearts of all Georgians. On behalf of Georgian people, Georgian President H.E. Mikheil Saakashvili conveyed heartfelt condolences to the families deprived of their loved ones

and to all the people of Japan. Thousands of Georgians visited the Embassy of Japan in Tbilisi and expressed their personal support to the people of Japan.

Japan has remained a trusted and reliable partner to Georgia since the country restored independence in 1991. The contribution of Japan and other friendly countries throughout these years has helped Georgia to make remarkable progress in its democratization and transition to a market economy. The relations have further strengthened since 2003, when the government of Georgia implemented wide-ranging economic reforms that have led to the dramatically improved investment climate, high growth rates of the economy (gross domestic product compound annual growth rate of 4.9 percent in 2003-2010, GDP growth rate peaking at 12.3 percent in 2007) and vast inflows of foreign direct investment. Georgia is a member of the World Trade Organization and now benefits from preferential trade relationships with de-

veloped economies such as the United States, European Union and Japan.

With its strong commitment to liberal economic reforms, the government of Georgia managed to revitalize the economy damaged by the double economic shocks of the military aggression of the Russian Federation in August 2008 and global financial crises, and thus achieved positive growth of 6.4 percent in 2010.

The World Bank/IFC 2011 Doing Business report named Georgia as the top reformer among the 174 countries over the last five years, placing Georgia 12th in the world in terms of ease of doing business. The country holds 29th place in the Heritage Foundation's index of Economic Freedom, out of 183 economies. The government was extremely successful in combating corruption. Transparency International placed Georgia in the top 10 of the least corrupt countries worldwide. The report also rates Georgia first in the world in terms of the

public perception of the decrease of corruption, with 78 percent of those surveyed claiming the corruption level has decreased.

We were delighted to acknowledge the further achievements in the areas of economic and trade cooperation between Georgia and Japan. A number of missions from private Japanese companies visited Georgia in the last year with the aim to utilize the investment opportunities in the areas of infrastructure development, agricultural production and energy, particularly hydropower, wind and solar projects.

In August 2008, Georgia witnessed Russia's large-scale military aggression, subsequent occupation and illegal recognition of the nonexistent, so-called "independence" of my country's inalienable regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia. With a grave violation of norms and principles of international law, the occupation of Georgia continues in violation of the Six-Point Cease-fire

Agreement of Aug. 12, 2008, despite numerous calls from the international community.

At present, Georgia's primary goal is to achieve the full de-occupation of the regions of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia only through peaceful means, with the assistance of the international community. Georgia's initiative, State Strategy on Occupied Territories: Engagement through Cooperation, could induce long-term reconciliation. The main foreign policy priorities for Georgia are NATO membership, intensification of the cooperation with the EU and the strengthening of regional economic ties.

Although an international mediation process, called the Geneva talks, which began in October 2008 over Georgia's occupied territories, has so far seen limited success, the forum remains a unique international mediation platform that keeps Georgia and Russia, parties to the conflict, at the negotiating table.

Although there are still chal-



Historic: Located near Tbilisi, Ananuri is a castle complex dating from the 17th century that was a seat of dukes of the area and the scene of numerous battles. EMBASSY OF GEORGIA

lenges ahead, Georgia has made remarkable progress in developing a modern tourism infrastructure. Many international hotel chains have opened or are developing properties in Georgia. We hope that more Japanese tourists will take the opportunity to visit Georgia and explore its culture, beautiful nature, world-renowned food, wine and warm hospitality.

In the aftermath of the Great East Japan Earthquake, the Embassy of Georgia in Tokyo has worked day by day with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of

Japan and Embassy of Japan in Tbilisi to support the people affected by the great disaster and to offer humanitarian assistance to the government of Japan. The government of Georgia provided \$1 million to the Japanese Red Cross Society as emergency assistance to Japan.

It is our fervent hope that Japan will recover from the wounds of the earthquake and tsunami, coming out of the crisis stronger than before, and in the coming years we will witness the further expansion of the strong partnership and cooperation between Georgia and Japan.

Congratulations

to the People of Georgia on Their 20th Independence Day



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