

Croatia national day

Nation of ancient history, with EU story to come

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AMBASSADOR OF CROATIA

Today, as the Republic of Croatia celebrates the 20th anniversary of its independence, I would like to use this opportunity to express, on behalf of H.E. Ivo Josipovic, the president of the Republic of Croatia, as well as the government and the people of the Republic of Croatia, our most sincere wishes for continued peace, prosperity and joy to Their Imperial Majesties Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko and to the government and great and friendly citizens of Japan.



It gives me great pleasure to highlight that the European Council has recommended ending negotiations on Croatia's accession into the European Union, and the talks are expected to end by June 30. We expect an agreement on Croatia's EU membership to be signed by the end of this year. After being ratified by all EU member states, the agreement should come into force in July 2013, making Croatia the 28th EU member state. This represents the official recognition of our six-year-long efforts in the process of the EU accession negotiations, and I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate all the Croatian citizens residing in Japan on this important event.

At the same time, I feel a profound need to express my sol-

emn condolences to the Japanese nation in these times of sadness and despair. To many families who were bereaved of their loved ones and whose property is now vanished I would like to say that we, the Croatian people, stand by you. I know personally of many individual inquiries and offers for help from the side of Croatian citizens who were deeply struck by the terrible events following the March 11 earthquake and tsunami. In their hearts and minds there was nothing but genuine sympathy for the Japanese people facing such a painful devastation.

I feel proud to say that my country offered relief to the government of Japan by proposing to accommodate and cover all the expenses for a group of 30

schoolchildren's stay in Croatia this coming August. It is my sincere hope that the beauties of the ancient city of Split and the hospitality of the Croatian people will help them bear their troubles more easily for a while. Besides this proposal, the Croatian government also donated \$700,000 for Japan's quake relief efforts.

Japan and Croatia have had 20 years of warm and friendly relations. During this time, our political dialogue has grown steadily, with the frequent official visits of our political leaders and executives over the years building the dialogue between our countries. Most recently, in 2010, the Speaker of the Croatian Parliament Luka Bebic and the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Integration Gordan Jandrokovic made official visits to Japan on separate occasions.

I am also particularly pleased to say that Japanese tourists have recognized Croatia as a hit destination in the past several years and that the number of tourists from Japan has grown manifold during this time. I believe this is one of the best ways to promote the links between our two cultures and further strengthen our friendly bonds.

Cultural cooperation has been one of the strongholds of our relations. Both Japan and Croatia are interested in further exploring possibilities for the exchange of representatives from all walks of cultural life — be it literature, design, music, fashion, theater, film or others. The experience of such previous visits and events proves that this cooperation has great potential.

I would like to use this opportunity to announce that several very popular Croatian artists, including pianists Maksim Mrvica, Kemal Gekic and Lovro Pogorelic and cellist Stjepan Hauser, will be having concerts in Japan this year.

Another proof of our deepening bilateral cooperation is the most recent establishment of two Consulates of the Republic of Croatia in Japan. I am honored to say that Hiroshi Ojima and Koichi Takakura will head the consulates as honorary consuls of the Republic of Croatia in the cities of Osaka and Naha, respectively, covering the consular areas of the Kansai region and Kyushu-Okinawa. Final preparations are now under way and the two consulates will be officially launched in the following couple of months.

Also in this context, I would like to mention a long-lasting friendship that has existed for several decades now between the sister cities of Kyoto and Zagreb, Kawasaki and Rijeka and Hekinan and Pula. And in Tokamachi, where the Croatian soccer team was stationed during the 2002 World Cup, a well-

known architectural team from Croatia, Penezic & Rogina, together with Japanese associates, is building the House of Japan-Croatia Friendship — a beautiful project that will upon its completion stand to honor sport and almost a decade of true friendship.

I am convinced that the existing friendly relations will continue to develop even further in the forthcoming period in which Croatia will focus on strengthening its economic growth in order to be better prepared for a full membership of the European Union. This will give it yet another opportunity to define its development capacities and needs and hopefully raise the economic links with Japan to a higher level.

In conclusion, allow me to express my gratitude to The Japan Times for providing me with an opportunity to address hereby its respected readers. Allow me to once again wholeheartedly congratulate all Croatian citizens residing in Japan, as well as all our friends from Japan and around the world who hold Croatia dear, on the 20th Statehood Day of Croatia.



Amphitheater: Pula Arena, constructed between 27 B.C. and A.D. 68 in the ancient Roman colonial city of Pula, is among the largest such structures surviving today. CROATIAN TOURIST BOARD



Expansive nature: The National Park of Croatia is on western Mljet, the southernmost and furthest east of the larger Adriatic islands. CROATIAN TOURIST BOARD

Congratulations on the Occasion of the Statehood Day of the Republic of Croatia



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on the 20th Anniversary of the Statehood Day of
the Republic of Croatia

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