

Ukraine independence day

Playing an active role in the world

Mykola Kulinich
AMBASSADOR OF UKRAINE

On Aug. 24, Ukraine celebrates a remarkable anniversary — the 20th anniversary of its independence. Twenty years ago, Ukraine started a new phase in its history, declaring the basic principles of political, economic and social development. It opened a new chapter in the national historical chronicle, an epoch of development of independent Ukraine.



Two decades ago, 150 countries recognized Ukraine as an independent state. Late in the last century, Ukraine was more often referred to as a former Soviet republic; in the early 21st century, it became evident that it is a new, free and democratic country.

Ukraine began a new life, having a strong potential inherited from the disintegrated Soviet Union, a feature that favorably

distinguished it from other countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States. The transition to a market economy proved very difficult for the nation. Yet the country has been showing economic growth for many years running. Now, the young country is confidently integrating into the global economy.

Now, thanks to the political stability established in the country, it has an investment climate favorable as never before. This means an opportunity to modernize the economy, introduce the latest technologies, build new factories and create jobs. In addition, Ukraine continues its path of reforms. The country is developing, taking into account the European experience and improving the standards of living for its citizens.

The legislative base is undergoing intensive modernization. Major areas of life are under reform: the country is implementing insurance-based medicine and pension insurance, structuring the labor market and introducing a contract-based army. The new tax code formu-

lates measures simplifying the relations between the government and business. One of the main assets of Ukraine is its fertile land. Ukrainians pin great hopes on a full-fledged land market, expected to be created in the near future.

A priority of Ukraine's domestic policy is to establish an equal dialogue between society and the establishment. New institutes of civil society are appearing in the country, through which Ukrainians can influence important decisions. The Constitution of Ukraine guarantees the citizens the freedom to unite into political parties and nongovernmental organizations. There are more than 3,000 NGOs registered in the country.

Ukraine is home to people of more than 130 ethnicities with different cultural and religious backgrounds living together in harmony. The state ensures the development and use of Ukrainian as the official language in all areas of life, at the same time guaranteeing the free development of the languages of ethnic minorities in accordance with

the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages.

Ukraine's achievements of the past decade are reflected, for example, in the country's membership in the World Trade Organization and the chance it has been given to join Poland as a host of the UEFA European Football Championship in 2012. These important events serve as an additional stimulus for the country toward transformation and modernization. As a result, new hotels are being built, airports and roads improved, and the infrastructure is becoming better. Ukraine plans to submit its bid to take part in the contest to host the 2022 Winter Olympics.

Foreign policy

The impressive scale of Ukraine, one of Europe's largest countries in terms of territory and population, does not allow it to be lost on a geographic map, while its active position in the international arena ensures its place on the political map as well. Ukraine pursues a balanced and consistent foreign policy. The country is open for cooperation with all interested countries and organizations.

In its foreign policy, our country sticks to the policy of European integration. Opinion polls show that most Ukrainians want ties to be as close with Europe as possible, up to full EU membership. We regard the European Union as the most acceptable social model and as our common home in the future. The times of empty talk regarding our "European choice" have passed. Ukraine has already been presented with a plan of action leading to a visa-free regime with the EU. Many efforts have been made to sign the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement, including plans to create a free-trade zone.

The chairmanship of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in 2013 is yet another opportunity

for the country to express itself on the international stage and demonstrate its commitment to its European integration plans. In addition, Kiev is looking toward U.N. Security Council membership in 2016-2017.

Ukraine today is a non-aligned country with no membership in any military-political association. The nonaligned status of our country was legislatively secured in 2010 in the law on internal and external policy basics. However, the country takes part in efforts to develop a European system of collective security and continues intensive dialogue with NATO. The issue of the country's entry into this alliance is no longer on the immediate agenda, but this fact is not an obstacle for joint military exercises and our participation in peacekeeping missions of NATO.

Ukraine is not only moving in the Western direction. The country has been strengthening its open and neighborly relations with the Russian Federation. For Ukraine, Russia is the largest trade partner and a huge market. In addition, many Ukrainians have family and friendly relations with the Russian people. In this connection, it should be noted that Europeans are actually interested in stable partnership between the two countries. Ukraine remains the major transit country for Russian natural gas transported to Europe, and it is very important for Kiev to make sure that Europeans regard it as a reliable and predictable partner.

In its foreign policy, Ukraine pays special attention to its relations with the United States. Our country counts on cooperation with the U.S. in bilateral issues, such as the needed support for reforms, and global ones, such as the fight against terrorism, drug trafficking and other crimes. Washington is interested in cooperation with Kiev in the energy field, specifi-



Historical: A monument to Bohdan Khmelnytsky (c. 1595-1657), regarded as a national hero in Ukraine who led an uprising against the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and founded a Cossack state, is in the center of the capital Kiev. UKRINFORM

cally, in developing the Black Sea shelf and shale gas deposits. In addition, the U.S., together with the EU, supports Ukraine in its efforts to modernize its energy sector and develop energy-saving technologies.

In the bilateral sphere, Ukraine is building strategic partnerships with key foreign partners on principles of equality and pragmatism, developing a network of long-term cooperation with the states that will become new centers of global political and economic development.

Relations with Japan

At the current stage, Ukrainian-Japanese relations continue to develop intensively in the light of successful results of the official visit of H.E. Viktor Yanukovich, the president of Ukraine, to Japan from Jan. 18-21. This visit made new, quality accents in the further cooperation between Ukraine and Japan aimed at implementing the next mutually beneficial initiatives and joint projects. New prerequisites for intensification and expansion of bilateral relations were outlined in the final document, the Joint Statement

on Ukraine-Japan Global Partnership, which has become the founding document for bilateral and multilateral cooperation for the forthcoming years.

The results of the visit of the Ukrainian head of state confirmed the readiness of both countries to maintain and strengthen political dialogue, intensify economic cooperation by implementing a number of promising and mutually beneficial projects, optimize the legal basis and enhance the whole spectrum of scientific and technological, cultural and humanitarian activities.

Today, in the terms of further expansion of investment cooperation between Ukraine and Japan in the field of energy saving and agriculture, all preconditions for concluding the bilateral investment treaty has formed. In this regard, agreement reached by leaders of both countries to launch negotiations on this issue became a significant achievement of the visit of President Yanukovich to Japan. Undoubtedly, the signing of this treaty will stimulate the flow of Japanese investment and increase the flow of Japanese cap-

ital to Ukraine.

An important impetus for implementing agreements achieved during Ukrainian-Japanese summit in January will be given by means of holding the next meetings in the framework of joint institutionalized mechanisms of cooperation between the two countries, which were established in previous years. It is about the activities of the Joint Committee on Cooperation headed by the foreign ministers of the two countries, joint meetings between the Coordinating Council for Economic Cooperation with Japan at the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade of Ukraine, and the Committee on Business Cooperation with Ukraine of the Keidanren (Japan Business Federation) and the Ukrainian-Japanese Commission on cooperation in science and technology.

Touching upon the recent trends in Ukrainian-Japanese relations, we cannot but speak about the dramatic events that occurred in Japan in March as a result of the powerful earthquake, the devastating tsunami and the accident at the nuclear

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Solidarity: Ukrainian Ambassador Mykola Kulinich presents items of humanitarian aid from his country to Kaname Tajima, vice minister of economy, trade and industry, in Fukushima City on Aug. 9. EMBASSY OF UKRAINE

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Orthodox: Created in the 11th century and repaired during the 17th and 18th centuries, St. Sophia Cathedral in Kiev is one of the city's best known landmarks and was designated as a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1990. UKRINFORM

Continuing friendly relations

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power plant Fukushima No. 1. I would like to pay tribute to the firmness and courage of the Japanese people, who suffered a double blow of natural disaster and the nuclear accident at the same time. I am sure that the "internal preparedness" and recollection of Japanese people to go through severe trials against the consequences of such disasters, as well as the self-discipline, concentration, mutual assistance and lack of any signs of panic deeply impressed all the people in the world who have been closely watching developments in Japan with great sympathy and moral support. Being a direct witness of how the Japanese overcame all hardships and difficulties, I once again became convinced of the extraordinary strength of spirit and national character, incredible cohesion and solidity of the Japanese nation. It was evidently proved when the country encountered a real problem on a nationwide scale. In our opinion, these features of the Japanese character considerably helped to reduce the number of many potential victims of this natural disaster. I am deeply convinced that the Japanese people will overcome all the negative consequences of the disaster and Japan will become even more powerful than before.

Concerning the bilateral cooperation between Ukraine and Japan in those difficult first days and weeks after March 11, I would like to note that our country, as a real friendly partner, immediately expressed its readiness to provide necessary assistance for overcoming the effects of these catastrophic events. Ukraine was one of the first countries in the world to offer humanitarian aid, technical and expert assistance to Japan. Thereby, on the March 17, a Ukrainian charter plane with humanitarian aid (2,000 blankets) arrived in Japan. This aid was transferred to the people from regions that suffered from the earthquake and tsunami through Japanese NGOs. In this regard, I would like to express my sincere and deep appreciation to the International Friendship Exchange Council of Japan (FEC) and the transport company Sagawa Express, which smoothly provided all necessary support for keeping

and delivering Ukrainian humanitarian aid to evacuation centers.

We are very pleased to point out that, under the extremely difficult domestic situation in Japan, a high official, the State Secretary for Foreign Affairs H.E. Chiaki Takahashi took part in the Kiev Summit for Safe and Innovative Use of Nuclear Energy, which was held in April under the framework of the initiative of President Yanukovich.

The second important step of our state within the provision of supplying humanitarian and technical assistance to Japan was made in early August. Following the instructions of President Yanukovich and in response to an official request from the government of Japan, the humanitarian cargo of the government of Ukraine in the form of individual means of radiation protection, including personal dosimeters (1,000 pieces), dosimeter-radiometers (1,000 pieces), gas masks (1,000 pieces) with replacement filters arrived in Japan on Aug 4.

On Aug. 9, I visited the city of Fukushima to participate in an official ceremony handing over the humanitarian assistance to the representatives of the government of Japan.

Currently, we continue to look for other opportunities to provide all possible assistance from my country to the friendly Japanese people in overcoming the consequences of Japan's large-scale national tragedy.

Visit Ukraine

At the very end of my article, I would like to take this opportunity to sincerely invite readers of The Japan Times to visit Ukraine. Every tourist can find something for himself in my country. For those who like beaches, we have the Black Sea and Azov Sea coastlines; for people who like mountains, there are the Crimean mountain chain and the Carpathians; and for those who prefer nature, there are unique preservation areas.

Ukrainians are hospitable and kind. It is worth visiting my country to feel its spirit and atmosphere. No one will remain indifferent to the beauty of Ukraine. You can hardly find a tourist who has been to Ukraine once and did not want to come back to see it again.

Welcome to Ukraine!

Congratulations

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