

Lithuania independence day

A rising, modern European country with deep historical traditions

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It is for 95 years already that on the Feb. 16 Lithuania celebrates one of the most important dates in its history — the day of the Restoration of the Lithuanian State — a history that has deep and honorable traditions.



Not long ago, in 2009, we commemorated the 1,000th anniversary of the first mention of Lithuania's name in historical documents — the Quedlinburg Chronicle. Through the efforts of the first King of Lithuania Mindaugas, the centralized State of Lithuania was created in the 13th century, which in the 16th century, in the Commonwealth with Poland, became the largest European state. There were, however, dramatic periods in our history, too, when the state was subjugated and, under compulsion, was erased from the map of Europe. Therefore, at the beginning of the 20th century the Lithuanian freedom-loving nation had to re-establish its state, and at the end

of the century — in the year 1990 — to regain its independence.

At the present time, Lithuania can be proud of having the image of a modern, democratic and forward-looking state. Lithuania is a state of the Baltic region that has become a responsible and respected member of the family of the countries of the world. We are active not only in the region but also in international forums and enjoy membership in the European Union and NATO. Not long ago, our state chaired the Community of Democracies, uniting more than 100 countries of the world, and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, uniting 56 member states and 12 partner countries. Japan is among the latter ones. In the second half of this year Lithuania is taking over the presidency of the Council of the European Union from Ireland. This is going to be one of the greatest challenges to our state in the recent decades. Lithuania will preside over the EU Council during a very important period for the EU when economic stability and growth is of great significance. Apart from these fundamental issues other items on the agenda of Lithuania's

presidency are the development of the energy market, energy security, Eastern Partnership and the Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region. We hope that the dialogue with the strategic partners of the EU, including Japan, will be successfully developed, too.

Today, Lithuania can also rejoice at the advantages of a market economy, and a growing economy. Having successfully overcome the financial crisis, which hit quite a number of states several years ago, in 2011 we reached 5.9 percent GDP (gross domestic product) growth, which accounted for about 3 percent the previous year. During 2012, foreign trade also increased considerably — the growth of both imports and exports amounted to almost 30 percent. On the basis of the data of fDi-Markets.com, last year one of the largest growths in foreign direct investments (FDI) in the world was recorded in Lithuania — 21 percent. According to this indicator, Lithuania took fifth place in the world and third place in Europe. More than 75 percent of investments were new "green field" investments, both in production and services sectors. Last year, Lithuania ranked 27th among 183 countries in the World Bank Group's Doing Business ranking.

Businesspeople and investors value Lithuania's good geographical position, very well-developed infrastructure of land and sea transportation, accessibility to both eastern and western

markets, the business-friendly environment. The following spheres of production that are most appreciated by the investors in Lithuania are biotechnologies, medical equipment, electronics, hardware and food industry. Well-educated, talented and skilled employees are also valued greatly. Lithuanians are one of the most educated people in the EU, they take first place according to the number of people who have secondary and high school education — 93 percent of the population.

We are glad that with every year interest that the residents of other countries take in Lithuania is on the increase. We really have a lot to offer to tourists. There is clean, unique nature with beautiful forests covering more than 30 percent of the territory, and thousands of lakes. The uniqueness of nature and Lithuania's rich cultural and historical heritage was noticed and appreciated on an international scale. UNESCO's World Heritage list includes the historic center of Vilnius, song and dance celebrations, the Curonian Spit, Žuvintas Biosphere Reserve, among others. With the number of tourists from different countries growing, we are really happy that last year the number of Japanese tourists who visited Lithuania increased by more than one-fifth as compared with the previous years.

I would like to take this opportunity to express satisfaction

with the relations between Lithuania and Japan that are strengthening with each year and are developing successfully. Our countries established diplomatic relations as far back as the first half of the 20th century. Last year, we commemorated the 90th anniversary of our diplomatic relations. Relations between our nations were made stronger by the heroic deed done by Chiune Sugihara, a Japanese diplomat, consul in Kaunas. When World War II broke out, he issued several thousands of transit visas to people of Jewish nationality, mostly Jewish refugees from Poland, for travel to countries via Japan and the Soviet Union, thus creating the possibility for more than 6,000 people to survive.

In 1990, after Lithuania had restored its independence, it did not take long to re-establish the relations between the two countries. During the past two decades our countries established not only excellent political and cultural relations, but also became good trading and economic partners; they cooperate in the sphere of energy, too. With every year interest in the Japanese language and culture is growing; also, the number of Japanese who come to Lithuania to learn the Lithuanian language is on the increase.

On this festive day, which is so significant to Lithuania, I want to express sincere gratitude to all friends of our country for their support, cooperation and friendship.



Culture and tradition: The Church of St. Francis and St. Bernardino in the capital Vilnius is one of the biggest Gothic places of worship in the country. V. VALUZIS



Nature: The Merkys River flows through southern Lithuania before joining the Neman River. K. DRISKIUS

Congratulations on the National Day of the Republic of Lithuania

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