

Albania flag day

A day to celebrate 101 years of independence and statehood

Bujar Dida
AMBASSADOR OF THE REPUBLIC OF
ALBANIA

Every Nov. 28 is a day of celebration for all Albanian people, a day to take pride in our long history and also to reflect on the challenges that lay ahead.

On this festive day, it is my distinguished pleasure as ambassador of the Republic of Albania to Japan, to extend on behalf of my country, the best wishes for health, peace and prosperity to Their Imperial Majesties Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko, the government of Japan, the welcoming Japanese people and to the Albanian community residing in Japan.

I am particularly honored today, to address all readers of The Japan Times and share with them some of my thoughts regarding the significance of this important day, and the overall level of the bilateral relationship between Albania and Japan, marking 91 years of diplomatic relations.

From a historical perspective, the Albanian ethnos represents one of the oldest nations in Europe, deriving from the ancient Illyrian tribes of the southwestern Balkans.

Though at the crossroads and

under the control of strong empires, for 15 long centuries Albania preserved its core language and endemic traditions; in addition, it enjoyed a period of independence under the legendary hero, Skanderbeg.

Aside from this period of self-rule, the country did not have nominal independence until 1912, when the Albanian Renaissance leaders proclaimed Albania a sovereign and independent country in the city of Vlora, on Nov. 28.

During the 19th century, Albanians resisted attempts to assimilate or divide within religious boundaries. Intellectuals from the national awakening movement led their country with the rallying cry "The religion of Albanians is Albanianism!" They formed the Albanian League in 1878 to unite the country, adopt a new alphabet, and develop the native language, education and literature.

In 1991, the Republic of Albania started comprehensive democratic reforms toward a market economy and democratization, and within a period of four years, joined the Council of Europe. In 2009, Albania became a NATO member, and following the serene and democratic parliamentary elections, and a peaceful transition of power to the opposition, the country is on track to receive Candidate Status for joining the European Union this December.

The overall objective of Alba-



Cultural roots: Apollonia, an ancient Greek city in modern-day Albania, has ruins dating back to the sixth century B.C. ALBANIA EMBASSY

nia's foreign policy focuses on the country's integration into the Euro-Atlantic structures, by enthusiastically supporting the accomplishment of integration standards, through the processes of political, economic, social and military transformations.

Albania has promoted good neighborly relations, aiming at regional security and peace, an idea strongly supported by the new Socialist government, under the motto "zero problems with neighbor (countries)."

In the last two decades, consecutive administrations have steadily increased Albania's role in the region, aimed at strengthening peace and stability, the international support of Kosovo for achieving U.N. membership, the implementation of the Ohrid

Agreement and the advancement of human rights to Albanian communities in the region.

The relationship between Albania and Japan is in its 91st year, since the establishment of diplomatic relations, and the overall bilateral relationship is profound, and includes cooperation in areas as diverse as politics, security, economy, trade, agriculture, tourism, culture and sports.

Special emphasis is put on the energy sector, mining industry and tourism. Promotion of tourism remains a priority for the Albanian government.

Substantial investment in roads and highways, major improvements in accommodation facilities, increased lodging capacity and the colorful mosaic of Albanian landscapes have re-

sulted not only in the inclusion of Albania as the top destination by Lonely Planet but de facto increased dramatically the number of tourists in the past year.

During this year's JATA Tabihaku Travel Fair in September, the Japanese public was introduced by Albanian agencies to a wide range of tours and opportunities to visit Albania, and the region.

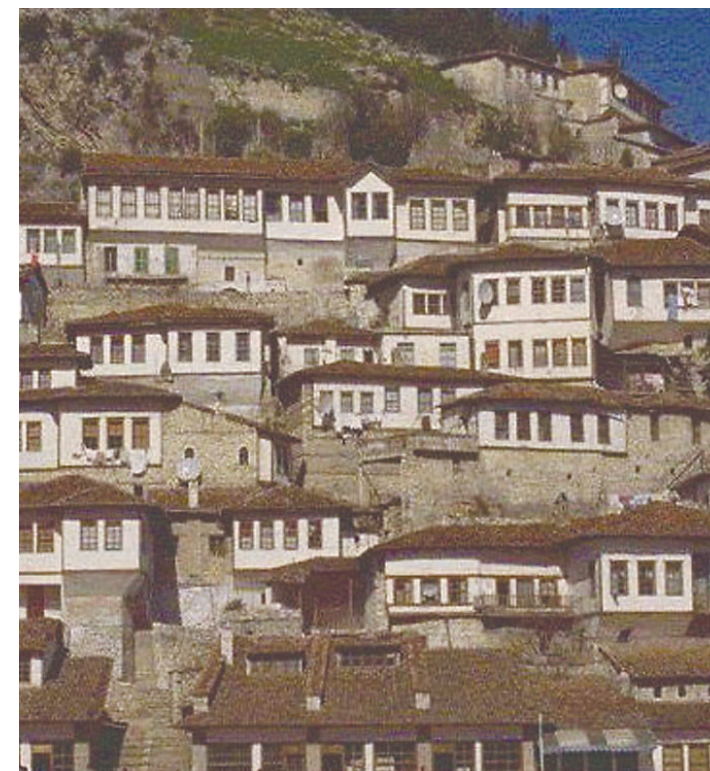
Albania's economy is considered a trade economy in transition. The private sector occupies the major part of GDP. To be mentioned in the Strategy of Albanian Economic Development for the years 2000-2013, are its overall structural reform according to the standards of the countries with a strong trade economy; the privatization of strategic sectors; and the stabilization of macroeconomic indexes with the final goal of increasing investment through implementation of

the Public Investments' Program, and attraction of direct foreign investment.

The close cooperation with international organizations such as the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, EU and EBRD, etc., are assurances for steady economic development and termination of the transition stage.

Looking toward such optimistic development and the favorable business climate, we strongly believe that the conditions are ripe for major direct investment from Japanese companies in all sectors of the economy.

Japanese citizens can travel freely to Albania, without visas, and also we have seen an increased number of tourist and business visits from Albanian nationals to Japan. Albanian citizens are learning the Japanese language, and showing consistent interest in cultural and social trends.



Recognition: Berat, in southern Albania, was designated as a World Heritage site for its historical significance. ALBANIA EMBASSY

Congratulations to the People of the Republic of Albania on the Occasion of The Flag Day

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Congratulations to the People of the Republic of Albania on the Occasion of Their Flag Day

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