

Greece national day

Shared spirit of respect, cooperation and hospitality

Nikolaos Tsamadou
AMBASSADOR OF GREECE

Today, as we Greeks celebrate our National Day and the Annunciation, it is my honor to respectfully greet their Imperial Majesties, Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko, the Japanese government and the friendly people of Japan, whose cooperation and support have facilitated the unequivocally positive relationship our countries have long enjoyed.

This year has ushered in a new era for the people and nation of Greece, as we begin to turn the corner on the economic difficulties that have plagued us for the last few years. Through much sacrifice, Greece has made significant strides in strengthening its economic solvency, and



in assuming the presidency of the European Union for the first half of 2014, we look forward to the new prosperity and bright future of a remade Greece and a healthier European Union. Much as Japan is recovering from the cataclysmic natural events of March 2011, Greece, with optimism and single-minded determination, is making a heroic comeback from its economic collapse. While the roots of the problems facing our two countries differ, our admirable efforts to overcome these unfortunate circumstances have displayed a similar strength and resilience in our peoples.

From our countries' unflinching dedication to preserving our time-honored traditions, to our love for nature and the observance of the changing seasons, the parallels between Japan and Greece go far beyond our tenacity during recent hard times, reaching back millennia into the

annals of history. In fact, much scholarship has been devoted to the analogous nature of the mythologies of Japan and Greece, particularly to the respective myths of Amaterasu and Demeter, at once both the givers and takers of light and life. The richness of the polytheistic traditions of our seafaring, island nations has certainly informed the personality and soul of our peoples, and the affinity that Greeks have for Japan, and vice-versa, is a testament to our ancient, and in some ways, uncannily similar histories.

Now, as in antiquity, it is the sea that gives life to our peoples. Recently, due to various economic factors, Greek shipbuilding in Japanese shipyards has seen substantial growth, providing important stimulus for the Japanese economy. Impressively, Greek buyers placed orders for 44 ships to be built in Japan last year. Japanese shipyards produced 286 ships for foreign buyers in 2013, which makes the number of Greek orders quite significant. This year will hopefully see a continuation of this mutually beneficial exchange between our two countries.

The sea, while bringing prosperity, can also bring contention, and Greece, like Japan, has had its fair share of maritime issues with its neighbors. In February, however, as the world basked in the warmth of the Olympic spirit in Sochi, we were reminded of the analogous concepts of *philoxenia* and *omotenashi*, which have long shaped our relations with outsiders, and which inspire all nations to



One of the most famous wall paintings at Knossos shows two youths carrying decorative pots. Knossos is the largest Bronze Age archaeological site on Crete, the biggest Greek island.

EMBASSY OF GREECE

come together in a spirit of respect, cooperation, hospitality and peace, concepts the ancient Greeks valued above all else. Last year, Tokyo's Olympic ambassador, Christel Takigawa, invoked the concept of *omotenashi* in her speech to the IOC, successfully securing Tokyo's Olympic bid. Together with our Japanese friends, Greeks celebrate Tokyo's well-deserved victory, and we welcome increased opportunities for cooperation in the lead-up to the games.

As the summer tourist season approaches, Greece again looks

forward to providing unparalleled travel experiences to visitors from around the globe. Last year, more than 17 million travelers were drawn to the natural splendor of our islands and the richness of our ancient culture. On offer is a staggering array of recreational activities to suit any budget, coupled with a dependable and safe infrastructure that meets the expectations of Japanese visitors. Like our Japanese counterparts, Greeks make every effort to please our guests, and we would like to reassure Japanese travelers of the safety and quality of the experiences that await them in Greece.

Bilateral cultural, economic exchanges flourishing

Masahiko Komura
CHAIRMAN, JAPAN-GREECE PARLIAMENTARY
FRIENDSHIP LEAGUE



On behalf of the Japan-Greece Parliamentary Friendship League, I would like to offer my congratulations on the Independence Day of Greece. I would also like to express my respect on this occasion for the dedication of the Greek people in their efforts to overcome their current economic hardship.

Greece is holding the presidency of the Council of the European Union for the first half of this year and, as Japan and the EU are global partners with shared fundamental values such as democracy and human rights, Japan places importance on strategic relationships with the EU. From an economic standpoint, I expect business opportunities will increase between Japan and Greece in the course of the Japanese economic revival as a result of "Abenomics," which will bring, for example, an increase of Japanese-built ships exported to Greece.

Greece is also the cradle of European civilization and the Greek culture and philosophy of life remains the spiritual backbone of western values. It is commendable that many vibrant

cultural exchanges are flourishing between Greece and Japan.

In this respect, I am very pleased to learn that Professor Masako Kido, of Kyoritsu Women's University, has recently completed a seven-year joint Japan-Greece project on the conservation and restoration of murals at the Holy Monastery of Phaneromenis on Salamina, an island near Athens. The murals as a whole are a superb example of the artistic heritage of the post-Byzantine era.

There are many other remarkable instances of cooperation between the two countries. The Athens Classic Marathon, which is held every autumn and traces the legendary route from Marathon to Athens, has a sister relationship with the Nagano Marathon and attracts many Japanese runners. Another example is a series of events centering on Lafcadio Hearn, who also went by the Japanese name of Yakumo Koizumi. This year marks the 110th anniversary of his death and many events commemorating the great writer of Japanese culture are planned.

I sincerely hope that, especially because Japan will host the Olympic and Paralympic Games in Tokyo in 2020, exchanges between the two countries will be further strengthened and more Japanese people become familiar with Greece.

Congratulations
to the People
of
the Republic of Greece
on the Occasion
of
the 193rd Anniversary
of
Their Independence



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Congratulations
to the People of Greece
on Their Independence Day

Japan-Greece Society

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While the incomparable museums and ancient ruins of Athens are well-known, other charming aspects of our capital city sometimes go unnoticed. "Rethink Athens," a bold initiative sponsored by the Onassis Foundation, aims to draw greater international attention to Athens by revamping and transforming a huge section of the city center into a greener, more efficient, and aesthetically pleasing space for both residents and visitors alike. Athens, the birthplace of democracy and western civilization, is on its way to reclaiming its eminence within Europe and the world at large, and we

welcome our Japanese friends to take part in the magic of our culture, one whose ideas forever altered the course of history, and will continue to play an important role in Europe and on the global stage.

Additionally, the next few months present visitors with extraordinary opportunities to participate in events that highlight the close cultural ties between Greece and Japan. The Athens Half-Marathon, organized by the Greek Association of Athletics Federation, has been scheduled to take place this year during Golden Week, on May 4th, thanks to the efforts of the Japanese Association for the Authentic Marathon (J.A.M.). The Japanese love for marathons is well-known, and the planning of the race during the Golden Week holiday will enable Japanese runners to more easily experience the delight of running in the historical footsteps of Pheidippides, the original marathon runner. Exactly two months later, on the Greek island of Lefkada, an international symposium, "The Open Mind of Lafcadio Hearn," will be held July 4 to 6, commemorating the 110th

anniversary of the death of the celebrated author of Greek-Irish descent. Through his beautiful and insightful prose, Hearn, later naturalized in Japan as Koizumi Yakumo, is credited for bringing Japanese culture to the West, and his books remain immensely popular today. The city of Lefkada, sister city to Shinjuku, looks forward to welcoming guests from around the world, and the symposium will feature a host of prominent speakers from Greece, Japan, and Ireland.

The enduring goodwill and mutual respect between our countries and peoples have been an inspiration to me during my five years in Japan, and I am grateful for the wonderful experiences that this post has afforded my family and me. As Lafcadio Hearn once said, "In Japan, there is a certain joy, of which the Western world can show no parallel." As my official tenure as ambassador to Japan nears its end, I feel I have come to know this joy, and will always remember fondly my time in Nippon. I look forward to continuing to serve, in an unofficial capacity, as a cultural ambassador between Greece and Japan.