

# Albania flag day

## Focus on democracy, diplomacy, integration

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AMBASSADOR OF THE REPUBLIC OF  
ALBANIA

The Nov. 28, is a very joyous occasion for all Albanians; an opportunity to feel proud of our long history as a people and also to reflect on future challenges ahead of us in the 21st century.



On this festive day, it is my distinguished pleasure as the Ambassador of the Republic of Albania to Japan, to extend the best wishes for health, peace and prosperity to Their Imperial Majesties Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko, the government, 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 bilateral relations between our two countries, which have enjoyed 92 years of diplomatic ties.

From a historical perspective, Albanians represent one of the oldest nations in Europe, having descended from the ancient Illyrian tribes of the south-

western Balkans. Though situated at a crossroads and under the dominance of empires, for fifteen long centuries the Albanian people persevered, preserving their core language and endemic traditions. The country did not enjoy nominal independence until 1912, when Albanian Renaissance leaders proclaimed Albania a sovereign and independent country, in Vlora city, on Nov. 28.

In 1991, the Republic of Albania introduced comprehensive democratic reforms toward a market economy, political pluralism and democratization of society. Within four years, it became a member of the Council of Europe and on July 9, 2009, Albania joined NATO as its 28th member state. Following free and fair parliamentary elections in the summer of 2013, a peaceful transition of power to the opposition parties and comprehensive reform initiatives by the new government of Prime Minister Edi Rama, the Republic of Albania received candidate status for joining the EU on June 24, 2014. The primary objective of Albania's foreign policy is the country's integration into the European Union, attempting to quickly fulfil integration standards through the processes of qualitative political, economic and social transformations benefit-

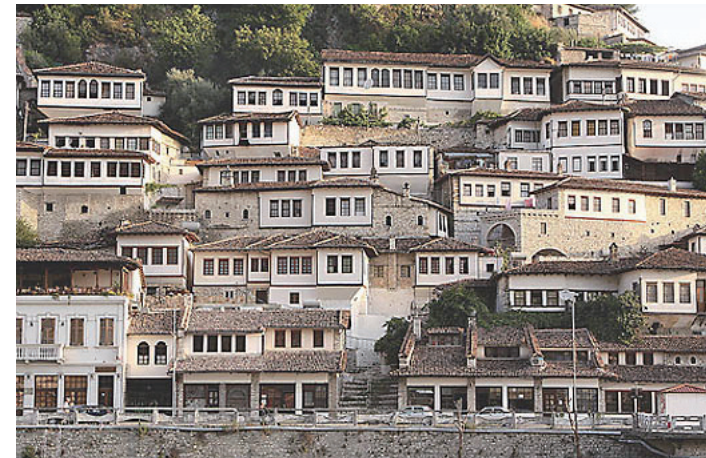
ing the general welfare of Albanians.

Albania has endeavored to promote good neighborly relations, aimed at regional stability, security and peace; an idea strongly supported by the government, under the motto "zero problems with neighbors." In the last two decades, consecutive administrations have steadily increased Albania's strategic role in the region, through our constructive diplomacy-oriented attitude, support for the international recognition of the Republic of Kosovo as a full member of the U.N., the implementation of Ohrid Agreement and the advancement of human rights to Albanian communities in the region.

The diplomatic ties between Albania and Japan are now in their 92nd year. The overall bilateral relationship is very good and spans cooperation in areas as diverse as politics, security, economy, trade, agriculture, tourism, culture and sports. Special emphasis is put on the energy sector, the mining industry and tourism. Promotion of tourism remains a priority for the Albanian government, which is coordinating closely with the Japan International Cooperation Agency through both state agencies and the private sector. Substantial investment in roads and highways,

major improvements in accommodation facilities, increased lodging capacity and the colorful mosaic of Albania's landscapes have resulted not only in the inclusion of Albania as a top destination by major guidebooks, such as Lonely Planet and Arukikata, but also a dramatic increase in the number of tourists in the past few years. The Japanese public is periodically introduced to a wide range of tours to Albania and the region, through joint efforts by the Embassy of the Republic of Albania in Japan, the National Agency of Tourism, the Japan Association of Travel Agents and other private Japanese companies targeting the Balkans.

This year marked an important milestone for the bilateral relations with Japan, thanks to the historic visit of the Speaker of the Japanese House of Representatives, Bunmei Ibuki, to Albania from Aug. 19 to 21. During the trip, Ibuki was accompanied by fellow Diet members Toshiko Abe, Yoshinori Oguchi, Toru Kikawada and Tadayoshi Nagashima. They held formal meetings with the President of the Republic Bujar Nishani, the Speaker of parliament Ilir Meta, and Prime Minister Edi Rama, as well as members of the opposition. The visit helped strengthen economic cooperation and overall bilateral rela-



Left, Berat, in southern Albania, was designated as a World Heritage site for its historical significance. Right, Gjirokastr Castle is in the southern Albanian city of Gjirokastr, which is also a World Heritage site representing a rare example of the influence of Ottoman architecture. ALBANIA EMBASSY



tions, within the framework of parliamentary diplomacy and the establishment of close relations between the parliamentary groups of the two countries. It is expected that a more dynamic Japanese economic and political diplomacy in the region will follow in the very near

future, as discussed candidly during another important visit in February of Japan's Parliamentary Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs, Takao Makino.

Looking at such optimistic developments and the favorable business climate, we strongly believe that the condi-

tions are ripe for major direct investments from Japanese companies in all up-and-coming sectors of the economy. Albanians are learning the Japanese language and showing consistent interest in cultural and social trends. Under the encouragement and sup-

port of the Minister of Education, Lindita Nikolla, and the Polytechnic University of Tirana following the presentation of the first methodology of the Japanese language in Albanian, it is expected that Japanese will be taught as a foreign language at the university level very soon.

### 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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