

Bulgaria National Day

Working to expand exports, boost tourism

Georgi Vassilev
AMBASSADOR OF BULGARIA

It is my great pleasure to extend my warmest greetings to the readers of The Japan Times and to all Bulgarians residing in Japan on the occasion



of the National Day of the Republic of Bulgaria, March 3.

As one of the oldest states in Europe, Bulgaria is proud of its magnificent and multifaceted historical and cultural heritage and its brilliant contribution to the European and world civilizations. Along with its golden ages, the history of Bulgaria is marked by long periods of hardship under foreign and totalitarian rule as well. Having overcome the numerous challenges in its recent transition period, Bulgaria today is a modern democratic state with a successful model of ethnic and religious tolerance, an active NATO and EU member state and a responsible participant in the international community.

At a time of serious challenges for Europe, Bulgaria has currently assumed for the third time the rotating chairmanship of the South-East European Coopera-

tion Process (SEEC) from last July 1 to June 30, and, for the second time, the chairmanship of the Council of Europe from November to May.

The traditionally friendly relations between Bulgaria and Japan have a long history and promising prospects for development. Overcoming time and distance, today Bulgaria and Japan are partners who share fundamental values, goals and common approaches to the present-day challenges in the world.

I would like to express my admiration for the remarkable achievements of the Japanese people, which have ranked Japan as a leading economic power at the forefront of world democracies.

In view of the growing EU-Japan partnership and the high priority of cooperation with Japan in Bulgaria's foreign policy, our efforts are focused on achieving a balanced, regular high-level political dialogue, developing new forms of cooperation in the fields of advanced technologies, science, education, sports and defense, while enhancing bilateral trade and economic relations. We attach particular importance to expanding Bulgarian exports to Japan, attracting direct Japanese investment and increasing the number of Japanese tourists. I take this opportunity to



The Fukuyama Rose Festival is held every year in May to celebrate cultural exchange between Fukuyama, Hiroshima Prefecture, and Kazanlak, Bulgaria, which is famous for its Rose Valley and oil-yielding roses. FUKUYAMA UNIVERSITY

highlight the excellent business environment in Bulgaria.

With its rich and diverse historical and cultural heritage and unique nature, Bulgaria is a tourist destination of rapidly growing popularity, providing excellent year-round opportunities for leisure and recreation on its Black Sea coast and in its mountains and hot spring resorts, with a rare chance to visit nine UNESCO World Heritage sites.

Today, there are more than 10 Bulgarian friendship societies all over Japan with two others established during the last year. The two latest additions being the Bulgarian Rose Cultural Association and a branch of the Bulgaria-Japan Friendship Association in Sano, Tochigi Prefecture. Thanks to their



The Plovdiv Roman theater in the center of Plovdiv, Bulgaria, is one of the world's best-preserved ancient theaters. Plovdiv will be the European Capital of Culture in 2019. EMBASSY OF BULGARIA

active cooperation many Bulgarian cultural initiatives have been successfully carried out. We enjoy fruitful cooperation with Okayama; Munakata, Fukuoka Prefecture; Fukuyama, Hiroshima Prefecture; Sakuragawa, Ibaraki Prefecture; Hodogaya, Kanagawa Prefecture; Sano; and many other municipalities.

In the field of education there are more than 45 agreements for academic cooperation between Bulgarian and Japanese universities and research institutes and new agreements were signed last year with Josai and Toyo universities. The number of the Japanese students who are studying and specializing in Bulgarian universities is increasing each year, especially in the field of medicine. At the same time, the number of Bulgarian students who have studied in Japan topped 500. The student exchange programs between Sofia University and Fukuyama University as well as

between Veliko Turnovo University and Maebashi Kyoai Gakuen College are successful models of international university exchanges.

I am certain that the friendship between Bulgaria and Japan will become even stronger and more fulfilling in the years to come.

In conclusion, it is my honor to convey to everyone my most sincere wishes for continued health, prosperity, happiness and peace.

I express my deepest respect and cordial greetings to Their Majesties Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko, members of the Imperial family, the Japanese government, the presidents of the Japan-Bulgaria Parliamentary Friendship Associations of the House of Councilors and the House of Representatives, the friendship associations and all those who actively work for the development of friendly relations between Bulgaria and Japan.

Developing friendly relations

Koichi Kishi
PRESIDENT, JAPAN-BULGARIA
PARLIAMENTARY FRIENDSHIP
ASSOCIATION

On behalf of the Japan-Bulgaria Parliamentary Friendship Association of the House of Councilors, I would like to express my heartfelt congratulations on the National Day of the Republic of Bulgaria.



For quite some time now, Bulgaria and Japan have maintained very close relations, including regular exchanges between the House of Councilors and the Bulgar-

ian National Assembly. In particular, I would like to express my gratitude to H.E. Georgi Vassilev, Bulgarian ambassador to Japan, for his efforts in proactively developing bilateral relations since his arrival.

Last year, I was one of several members of the association to visit Bulgaria and was pleased to show my appreciation to the Bulgarian people for the Bulgarian State Order Madara Horseman conferred upon me in 2014 by H.E. Rosen Plevneliev, president of the republic, as well as to discuss a variety of ways of deepening our bilateral relations with key governmental and parliamentary officials such as Plevneliev and H.E. Tsetska Tsacheva, president of the na-

tional assembly.

During our visit, we also enjoyed several excellent opportunities to interact with the people of Bulgaria and attended a business forum in which small and medium-sized enterprises from both countries discussed the potential to develop further. Experiences such as these remind us that there is still much potential for even closer ties between our countries.

Based on our experiences during our visit, we, the members of the association, are pleased to continue our efforts to further the development of friendly relations between our two countries.

In closing, I wish the Republic of Bulgaria continued success and prosperity.

Amicable bilateral bonds growing across many areas

Toshimitsu Motegi
PRESIDENT, JAPAN-BULGARIA PARLIAMENTARY LEAGUE
OF FRIENDSHIP

It is my distinct honor and pleasure, on behalf of the Japan-Bulgaria Parliamentary League of Friendship of the House of Representatives and myself, to convey congratulations on the occasion of the National Day of the Republic of Bulgaria and offer my sincere wishes for the development and prosperity of the country and people of Bulgaria.

Needless to say, Japan and Bulgaria have a friendly and strong relationship founded on



common values. I am very much delighted that such a bilateral relationship has been developing steadily across many fields and is recognized not only at the governmental level, but also among the people of both countries. Among other things, we have seen an increase of Japanese tourists in Bulgaria, achieved brand awareness for Bulgarian yogurt, wine and roses, and witnessed the great success of Bulgarian sumo wrestlers in Japan.

Building on such friendly ties, I hope mutually beneficial relations between our countries will deepen further. In this regard, I would like, as the president of Japan-Bulgaria Parliamentary League of Friendship of the House of Representatives, to put forth efforts into realizing active exchanges and cooperation with our partners in Bulgaria.

Congratulations to the people of the Republic of Bulgaria on their National Day

President

Fumiko Matsuda

松田 文子

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