
Kosovo National Day

Incredible journey for Europe's newest state

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AMBASSADOR OF KOSOVO

On this special day for the people of Kosovo, it is my great honor, on behalf of His Excellency President Hashim Thaci and the people of Kosovo, to convey warmest greetings and respect to Their Imperial Majesties Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko, His Excellency Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and the people of Japan for the friendship and support they have lent to Kosovo.



When asked how Kosovo is doing, I sometimes reply, "Worse than I wish it was doing, but much better than most people abroad believe." After a long struggle and oppression, Kosovo acquired independence on Feb. 17, 2008. This anniversary is a reminder to all Kosovars of the sacrifices we have made to live in peace and freedom.

Building a country anew is like learning to be a pilot while flying, and Kosovo naturally has

its own share of challenges. But Kosovo can proudly point to the road it has traversed as it narrows the gap with its neighbors on most indicators. Today, Kosovo boasts a stable banking system, a network of highways under construction, regular free and fair elections, the most vibrant and free media in the region and major economic reforms that have boosted Kosovo's ease of doing business ranking.

Rich mineral resources, an educated young labor force and the recent Stabilization and Association Agreement with the EU make Kosovo more attractive for companies to set up production facilities aimed at exports to the European Union. American fast-food chain KFC has opened several branches, a harbinger that the investment climate has indeed improved. Kosovo is a member of the IMF, World Bank and International Olympic Committee, and looks toward more ambitious goals such as joining the U.N. After years of using country codes of other countries, we have recently obtained our own (+383).

Although small (with just 2 million inhabitants), Kosovo is a stable and reliable ally. Kosovo

has exhibited a steady foreign policy and shown maturity as it resolved the last remaining difficult issues with Serbia. Kosovo has a modern constitution committed to multiethnic coexistence, democracy, liberal values and the rule of law. Kosovo has also been a leader in the fight against radicalization.

We have maintained an embassy in Japan since July 1, 2010, and I am honored with the wonderful opportunity to be the third ambassador to serve Kosovo in this great country. In addition to deepening our diplomatic ties, I enjoy the fascinating experience in Japan as we nurture social ties between our two societies. During this period, Japan has assisted Kosovo in numerous fields and Japan's significant contributions have helped Kosovo's economy, environment and social development.

Kosovo and Japan share similar values in statecraft and foreign policy, as well as traditions, and I eagerly look forward to getting the two societies to know more about each other. The number of Japanese tourists has quadrupled in one year. The very first time we partici-

pated in the Olympics, we won a gold in judo, another link to Japan.

I would like to express our appreciation to the government and people of Japan for the cooperation extended to us throughout the years and the profound appreciation for the Honorary Consul-General Isao Iijima, the Japan-Kosovo Parliamentary Friendship League, the Japan-Kosovo Friendship Association and the Kosovar students who proudly represent Kosovo here.

In the coming years, I commit to further contribute to active and comprehensive relationships with growing high-level visits, increased trade, cultural exchanges, academic cooperation and tourism. In today's interdependent world, it is up to democratic liberal countries to work closely to contribute to the rule of law, trade and environmental protection.

For us, Japan is important in its own right, but it also serves as a hub as we try to make new friends across East and Southeast Asia. Kosovo has been recognized as a sovereign nation by 113 U.N. members and it is important that we reach out to the remaining countries.