

Albania Flag Day

Cultural ties help bridge geographic divide

GJERGJ TENEQEXHIU
AMBASSADOR OF ALBANIA



It is a privilege and an honor for me as ambassador of the Republic of Albania to extend on behalf of the Albanian government my warmest greetings to Their Imperial Majesties Emperor Akihito and

Empress Michiko and to the friendly Japanese people on the 105th Anniversary of the Independence of Albania.

I come from a part of the world dominated by ancient Hellenistic thought and philosophy. Those wise men of 3,000 years ago used to refer to Europe as what was their northern borders. Where Albanians lived back then continues to be the Albania of today, one of the most ancient nations of Europe, but with a relatively young modern history.

For centuries my country has been the battleground of the East and West. Many

empires have ruled our lands, beginning with the Romans, followed by the Byzantines and ending with the Ottomans. Right there, in the middle of the Balkans, the thin line between different religions has shaped today's Albania. A country where for centuries, Catholicism, Orthodoxy and Islam have co-existed unlike anywhere else, because we have all identified ourselves first as Albanians.

Albania for centuries has produced and given to all its rulers, brave warriors, wise statesmen and visionary clergymen. Popes, governors and prime ministers of Albanian origin have left their marks — both positive and negative — on the history of Europe.

Just 105 years ago, we decided to live on our own and fulfill the ongoing dream of all those who could not abide living under foreign rule any longer. The uprisings at the beginning of the 20th century marked the start of the final collapse of the Ottoman Empire to give light to an independent Albania. We suffered greatly from this process. More than half of our people and territories were separated from Albania.

Two world wars have not helped our

country either, bringing every kind of totalitarianism of the time to our doorstep. From the harsh days of Nazi-fascism to 45 years of Stalinism, much Albanian potential was wasted.

But 27 years ago, when the light of democracy came above the skies of Eastern Europe, there was no doubt about us. We embraced the European path without any hesitation or discrepancies. Finally, we were free to choose our own path and it is natural for all Albanians to think of their future in the everlasting European family.

Thanks to the free market economy, Albania has achieved outstanding progress in overcoming all difficulties of the past. We have the biggest tourism potential in the Mediterranean basin and we are economically and touristically a very safe place; a wonderful destination waiting to be discovered.

Being a NATO member has brought our country many advantages in terms of security. Albania has accommodating legislation for foreign investors and the country presents a great opportunity for anyone

looking to invest their money. We have the youngest population in Europe, and they are very well trained and educated.

For the Albanian government, professional education and training is our main priority. And again, we are the ideal tourist destination due to the perfect geographical position of our country. Our sandy, pebbly and rocky beaches merge into gorgeous mountains and valleys filled with beautiful lakes and powerful rivers. We have much delicious cuisine to offer that is available at incredibly affordable prices.

I am delighted to be living testimony

to the increasingly wonderful relations between Japan and Albania. This year, Japan opened its embassy in Tirana and Japan's State Minister for Foreign Affairs Nobuo Kishi visited our capital. Japan has always been by our side since the early 1990s. Japan has granted hundreds of millions of dollars of financial aid to our country for education, infrastructure, energy, environment, mining, human resources education and more.

I am personally a living example of someone who had the opportunity to study in Japan in the early 1990s at Kyushu

University; a unique experience. In our youth, my friends and I grew up watching the movies of Akira Kurosawa, Takeshi Kitano, Hayao Miyazaki and reading the novels of Haruki Murakami and Seicho Matsumoto.

I would very much like to thank The Japan Times for honoring me today by being present for this 105 anniversary of Albania's independence and helping to build the cultural bridge that helps reduce the geographical distance between the two countries. In closing, I invite everyone to please come to visit Albania.



The statue of Gjergj Kastriot Skanderbeg, a national hero of Albania
EMBASSY OF ALBANIA

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

Honorary Consul, Professor: **Hiroshi Maeda**

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