

Bulgaria National Day

Further strengthening relations on a wide variety of levels

BORISLAV KOSTOV
AMBASSADOR OF BULGARIA



It is my great pleasure to extend my warmest greetings to the readers of The Japan Times on the occasion of the Republic of Bulgaria's National Day celebrating the 140th anniversary of

the national liberation of Bulgaria.

It was on March 3, 1878, that Bulgaria reappeared on the political map of Europe and embarked on the road to development as a modern state.

Today, 140 years later, Bulgaria is a proud member of the community of democratic nations, an active member of NATO and the European Union.

For the first time on Jan. 1 — 11 years after it joined the European Union — Bulgaria took over the presidency of the Council of the European Union that rotates every six months. The motto of the Bulgarian

presidency is "United We Stand Strong." This motto in Bulgarian is enshrined in the country's coat of arms.

A key priority of the Bulgarian EU presidency is the European perspective and connectivity of the Western Balkans. Bulgaria will work to move all the countries of the Western Balkans forward on their path to EU integration.

As president of the Council of the EU, Bulgaria will play a constructive role in the EU-Japan dialogue and will contribute to close cooperation on important international and regional issues.

Bulgaria highly values its multifaceted relations of friendship, mutually beneficial cooperation and partnership with Japan that have withstood the test of time.

In the past year we advanced our high-level political dialogues and further strengthened the ties between our parliaments.

The official visit of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to Bulgaria in January has provided a huge impetus and further cemented our friendly and cooperative ties, raising them to a new height and adding a wider regional dimension to them.



Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union logo.

The visit of the Deputy Prime Minister Tomislav Donchev to Japan last month provided an important follow-up in the areas of foreign policy, economic and business ties.

Significant steps were taken toward institutionalizing and intensifying our cooperation in the areas of science and technology.

Additionally, Japanese companies have widened the areas and scope of their investment and business activities in Bulgaria.

The long-standing cooperation between

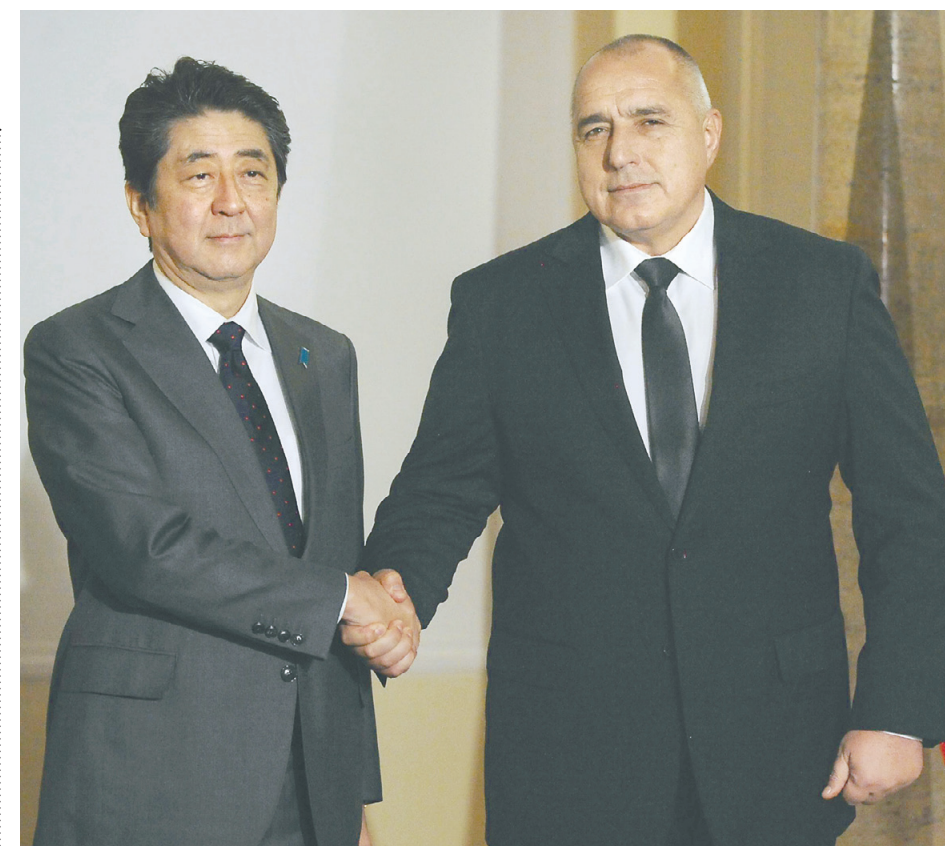
the Bulgarian company LB Bulgaricum and Meiji Co. in the production of Bulgarian yogurt in Japan has further strengthened and resulted in a strong impact on other important aspects of our relationship.

Cultural and educational exchanges have been as intensive as ever. Nowadays, bonds of cooperation between Bulgarian and Japanese municipalities and universities are expanding.

Friendship associations, societies and clubs have supported the extensive people-to-people contact.

Three Japanese cities have partnered with Bulgarian sports federations under the Host Town Initiative to hold training camps for Bulgarian athletes in preparation for the 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games in Tokyo.

We have started preparations to celebrate important anniversaries in 2019 — 110 years since the first official bilateral contacts, 80 years since the establishment of diplomatic relations and 60 years since the restoration of these relations between Bulgaria and Japan. The exchanges and events that will be organized on this auspicious occasion will bring our countries and people even closer.




Prime Minister Shinzo Abe shakes hands with Bulgarian Prime Minister Boyko Borisov in Sofia during his official visit to Bulgaria on Jan. 14. EMBASSY OF BULGARIA



The National Assembly in Sofia. EMBASSY OF BULGARIA

**Congratulations
to the People of Bulgaria
on their National Day**



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



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