
Kosovo National Day Special

Major milestones in bilateral ties promote democracy, globalism

LEON MALAZOGU

AMBASSADOR OF KOSOVO



On behalf of the people of Kosovo, it is my great honor to convey warm greetings and respect to Their Imperial Majesties Emperor Naruhito and Empress Masako,

His Excellency Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and the people of Japan for the warmth and care they have lent to Kosovo. Last month when Japan opened its newest diplomatic mission in Pristina, it marked the main milestone of a culmination of efforts made over the past decade between Kosovo and Japan and we look

forward to the mission's inauguration in late spring.

Twelve years ago was the most momentous day in our history as we declared independence, ushering a new country into the world community of democracies. As a country born in the 21st century, Kosovo exhibits one of the most democratic constitutions in the world, recognizing and respecting a wide range of individual and group rights.

Last week, a new government was formed, composed of two parties hitherto in opposition, showing strong democratic capital in a Euro-aspirant country.

Last year was special for Japan as it ushered a new and promising era, Reiwa, but the year was also auspicious for its relations with Kosovo. Marking the 10th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Kosovo and Japan, 2019 was the

most active in our joint history. It started with a first-ever visit by the president of the parliament of Kosovo, paving the way for greater collaboration between the legislatures of both countries. A joint piano performance by a Kosovar and Japanese artist got me to visualize how harmonious the joint performance between Kosovo and Japan can be in many sectors.

Last year was also the first visit of President Hashim Thaci, who visited Japan twice in 2019 — a four-day official visit in September, and to attend the enthronement ceremony in October. Both of these occasions were followed by very successful summits with Abe. During the second visit, Thaci conferred recognitions to numerous Japanese officials who have been supportive of Kosovo since the war.

The summits with Abe once again proved that Japan is Kosovo's true friend

and a most reliable ally in Asia. As Kuni Miyake, an op-ed columnist of The Japan Times, also found out when he visited the Balkans, both Kosovo and Japan have benefited from a free and liberal international environment that has fueled democracy and growth in the past decades. Kosovo welcomes Abe's willingness for Japan to play a greater role internationally as it behooves a mature democracy to which many countries seek as they face future challenges.

Kosovo is Japan's most like-minded partner in the Western Balkans as it offers Japan a reliable political relationship, as well as being an efficient hub for reaching out to the rest of the Balkans and much of the European Union. Japan's newly-opened embassy in Pristina will further deepen our ties.

As Japan gets to know Kosovo better, it

will discover the similarities between our old highlander's code, the Code of Leke Dukagjini, and Bushido, which espouse many of the same principles. This deep similarity in mindset can underpin trustworthy collaboration between our contemporary societies and enable joint action in the world stage.

Meanwhile, the Kosovo-Japan Friendship League at the National Diet has more than doubled in size, while the media have moved beyond stories about war to discover that Kosovo is attractive to visit and a lucrative place in which to invest.

In August, days before the World Judo Championships 2019, five of our top judoka stayed in Sanjo, Niigata Prefecture, our Olympic host town. The warm reception helped them overcome jetlag and get used to the climate, helping them reach their biggest success — three med-

als at Tokyo's Nippon Budokan. There, they were cheered on by the second-largest group of fans present, our supporters from Sanjo, who waved numerous Kosovar flags and cheered for our athletes.

In December, together with Sanjo, we organized a cooking workshop, which is one of the images that will appear on the new postage stamps to be issued as part of the host town series.

Ahead of the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, the whole Kosovar Olympic team will go to Sanjo where they will be welcomed with people's hospitality as well as the mini museum that Sanjo has devoted to Kosovo at its new sports facility.

This content was compiled in collaboration with the embassy. The views expressed here do not necessarily reflect those of the newspaper.