

Bulgaria National Day Special

Mutual ties continue to prosper

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AMBASSADOR OF BULGARIA



On the occasion of the National Day of the Republic of Bulgaria — March 3 — I have the privilege to extend to the readers of The Japan Times warm greetings and best wishes for good health, prosperity

and happiness.

On March 3, 1878, Bulgaria reappeared on the political map of Europe and embarked on the road of independent development. Today, the country is a proud member of the community of democratic nations, a country with a fast growing economy, member of the European Union and North Atlantic Treaty Organization, and a factor of stability in Southeastern Europe.

Bulgaria enjoys a longstanding relationship of traditional friendship, cooperation and partnership with Japan based on common values and principles, including fundamental freedoms, democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights. It is a relationship that has withstood the test of time.

The past year — 2019 — the first year of the new Reiwa Era, was very special for Bulgaria-Japan relations. We celebrated three anniversaries of bilateral relations under a joint logo, — 110 years since the first bilateral contacts, 80 years since the establishment of diplomatic relations and 60 years since the resumption of diplomatic relations. Numerous commemorative events — political, economic, academic and cultural — held both in Japan and in Bulgaria saw engagement at the highest political level and contributed to the strengthening of the bilateral relationship, and bringing our two countries even closer. Both Bulgaria and Japan have sought to enhance and deepen bilateral relations in various fields, to further develop their strategic partnership and to build an action-oriented partnership.

High-level bilateral dialogue gained a strong momentum. President of Bulgaria

Rumen Radev visited Japan in October on the auspicious occasion of the enthronement of His Majesty Emperor Naruhito. President Radev's fruitful meeting with Prime Minister Shinzo Abe was an important landmark in our relationship. Visits of the foreign ministers of Bulgaria and Japan, Ekaterina Zaharieva and Taro Kono (now minister of defense), were exchanged in March and August respectively, highlighting the Triple Anniversary and strengthening cooperation on bilateral, regional and international matters. In Sofia, Kono called on Prime Minister Boyko Borissov. In Tokyo, Zaharieva also participated in the World Assembly for Women. Bulgarian women-parliamentarians participated in the Women Political Leaders Summit in Tokyo in June. Visits of Bulgarian delegations at the deputy ministerial level in defense, economy and disaster management contributed to the expansion of the scope of our cooperation. Bulgaria and Japan started joint cooperation with Western Balkan countries in the areas of disaster management and small and mid-sized enterprises promotion.

A Japan-Bulgaria Economic Seminar held in Tokyo in September, attended by Minister for Foreign Affairs Toshimitsu Motegi and Minister for Reconstruction Kazunori Tanaka, as well as a bilateral economic forum in Sofia in February 2020 attended by President Radev and Minister of Economy Emil Karanikolov, with Bulgarian and Japanese companies participating in both events, highlighted the willingness of both countries to expand economic and investment cooperation, taking advantage of the opportunities provided by the EU-Japan economic partnership agreement. The number of Japanese companies doing business in Bulgaria has grown.

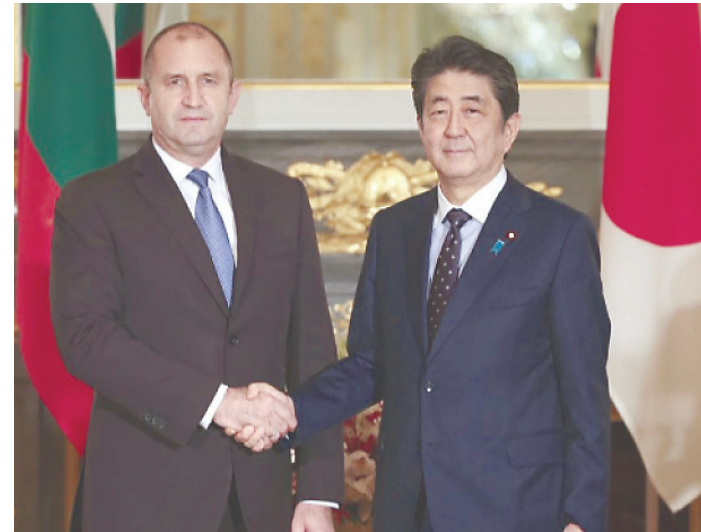
An academic symposium on Bulgaria-Japan relations was held in Tokyo in June, along with an exhibition of paintings by Bulgarian artists. A conference on "Japan and the European Southeast — Over a Hundred Years of Political, Economic, Cultural and Academic Interactions" was held in Sofia in November. A book titled "Bulgaria and Japan — Politics, Diplomacy, Personalities

and Events" was published in Bulgaria on the occasion of the Triple Anniversary. A commemorative postcard for the Triple Anniversary was issued in Bulgaria. Japanese and Bulgarian dignitaries, politicians, artists and musicians were decorated with high awards by both governments for their contribution to the development of bilateral relations.

Several Bulgarian cultural groups and musicians held performances in a number of Japanese cities during the year. There was large-scale Japanese participation in the cultural program Plovdiv: European Capital of Culture 2019. Municipalities and universities from the two countries continued with their mutually beneficial exchanges. Bulgarian language courses at universities in Tokyo, Kobe and Osaka reflect the growing interest among Japanese students in learning more about Bulgaria. Activities of friendship associations and societies contributed greatly to the development of our bilateral ties and to the strengthening of people-to-people contacts. For a third consecutive year, Japanese runners participated in the annual Sofia marathon in October.

With all eyes set on the 2020 Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games, Bulgarian sports teams continued holding training camps in several Japanese cities in preparation for the Olympics, benefiting from the host town initiative of the Japanese government. I do hope that the 2020 Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games will be successful for the Bulgarian athletes. In our views, the strong ties established with the Japanese host towns — Murayama (Yamagata Prefecture), Okayama, Munakata (Fukuoka Prefecture), Ichikawa (Chiba Prefecture), Sakuragawa (Ibaraki Prefecture) and Hodogaya Ward of Yokohama (Kanagawa Prefecture) — will continue to develop beyond the Tokyo 2020 Olympics and will encompass wider areas such as culture, education, trade and economy. They will constitute an important input and will expand the framework of Bulgaria-Japan relations.

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



Left: Bulgarian President Rumen Radev meets Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in Tokyo on Oct. 24. Right: The Bulgarian Orthodox Alexander Nevsky Cathedral stands in Sofia. EMBASSY OF BULGARIA



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Congratulations

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



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