
Croatia National Day Special

Strong display of resilience in trying times

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Croatian Statehood Day is celebrated on May 30 in memory of the inauguration of the first multi-party parliament on May 30, 1990. The first free, multiparty elections were held in Croatia in the

spring of 1990 and the results of the elections clearly confirmed the Croatian people's wish for freedom and democracy. After regaining its independence in 1991 and winning the Homeland War after four years of struggling for freedom, a new chapter in the country's history started.

Today, Croatia is a member of NATO and the European Union and currently holds the rotating presidency of the EU Council (Jan. 30 to June 20). Croatia's biggest port city, Rijeka, was designated a European Capital of Culture for 2020, but due to the coronavirus outbreak, most activities and performances, including those of Japanese artists, had to be postponed for post-pandemic times.

Croatia is known worldwide for the richness of its natural and cultural heritage with a number of UNESCO World Heritage sites. Exposure to various cultures and influ-

ences resulted in a very rich and equally diverse gastronomy, as well as wine and beer production. All of these factors have contributed to the popularity of Croatia as a tourist destination. Due to its very successful response to the coronavirus, Croatia has been gradually reopening and is already welcoming foreign tourists, while making sure that the necessary safety measures are in place. Last year, Croatia hosted almost 20 million international visitors, including 160,000 Japanese tourists. Many of these Japanese tourists visited the capital city of Croatia — Zagreb.

Unfortunately, on March 22, the strongest earthquake in 140 years struck the city of Zagreb and its surroundings. The earthquake claimed the life of a 15-year-old girl and left dozens of people injured and many more homeless. It also caused widespread damage to buildings, including several hospitals, museums and other cultural institutions, government buildings and parliament, schools and religious buildings, one being Zagreb's iconic cathedral.

This event left Zagreb with many visible and even more invisible scars. Zagreb is best known and most loved for its laid-back central European atmosphere, friendly people and beautiful historic buildings. However, it is exactly these buildings in Zagreb's historic center that suffered the most damage in the earthquake and it will take a lot of time and

enormous effort to rebuild Zagreb's center. The people of Zagreb need help rebuilding their city and making it safer for themselves and future guests. Japan's experience and expertise in disaster relief would be of great value.

In Croatia, as well as in many other countries, the Japanese have become a subject of admiration and source of inspiration for their resilience in difficult times. For many years, Japanese and Croatian people have shared friendship, sympathy and solidarity both in good and difficult times, from the Croatian Homeland War to the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami in March 2011, and I am sure that this occasion will be no exception.

Croatian athletes are very much looking forward to participating in the Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games with high hopes to confirm the status of our country as a sporting powerhouse.

Croatia is keen to strengthen and deepen economic ties with Japan. There is a huge potential for the increase of trade and investments between our countries. The Embassy of Croatia in Japan will continue to work tirelessly toward maximizing that potential.

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