

TOKYO'S TOP ENVOY TO TIRANA ITO EXCLUSIVELY FOR ADN

"Japan-Albania, Important Partners"

"Our peoples have many similarities; the people are hardworking, respect the family values, and both countries are well known for their friendliness, hospitality, beautiful nature," said Ambassador Ito

by **Genc Molloja**
SENIOR DIPLOMATIC EDITOR

"In addition to economic assistance, now Japanese companies are starting to be more interested in investing in Albania in the future. I hope our business relations will be strengthened and as a Japanese Ambassador I am explaining and briefing Japanese business executives about the positive business environment in Albania, currently," has said the Ambassador of Japan to Albania, Makoto Ito.

In an exclusive interview with Albanian Daily News, Ambassador Ito, who presented his credentials as Tokyo's first resident top envoy to Tirana on June 6, 2017, underlined that the Japanese Government strongly supported the Albanian efforts to reform including the judicial reform.

Dwelling on the Japanese foreign diplomacy, Mr. Ito listed three main pillars: Maintaining strong political, economic and defense alliance with the United States, strengthening the friendly and peaceful relations with the neighboring countries, as well as the European Union and other European countries, as well as the strengthening of the multilateral cooperation and contribution in the field of disarmament, human security and economic cooperation.

"It is very natural for the Balkan Countries to share their aspiration to join the European Union, to join a greater regional organization which shares common values, and resources in the field politics, economy and defense," said Ambassador Makoto Ito in the interview which follows:

- Mr. Ambassador the upgrading of the relations between Albania and Japan, climaxing with the opening of the Embassy in April this year, and the presentation of the credentials by you on June 6, have marked a new era in the bilateral relations between the two countries. How would you assess the current and perspective of the ties between the two countries?

- Japan and Albania are important partners sharing common fundamental values such as democracy, free market economy, human rights.

Furthermore Japan and Al-

bania have many similarities; the people are hardworking, respect the family values, and both countries are well known for their friendliness, hospitality, beautiful nature, mountains seacoast and rivers.

For such similar countries it is natural to establish friendly and close ties.

- The relations between Albania and Japan have an old history and they are particularly marked by your country's predisposition to help Albania, especially after the establishment of pluralism in 1992. Which are some of the highlights of Japan's increasing aid?

- Until now, through the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) or other governmental agencies, Japan has been supporting the development of Albania. Currently the projects which are being implemented through the assistance of Japan are:

1. The "Greater Tirana Sewerage System Improvement Project" is a project which aims to improve the quality of both groundwater and river water by constructing sewerage facilities in the Greater Tirana Area

2. The Project on Geospatial Information and sustainable

development in Tirana-Durres Area, started in January 2017 and aims to enhance the social and economic developments activities of this area, by utilizing large scale digital topographic maps

3. The Grant Assistance for Grassroots Projects in Albania provides an annual amount of approximately 75 Thousand USD every year.

And hopefully more to come.

- In the meantime, steps have been undertaken to consolidate and diversify the economic cooperation between Japan and Albania, with the latter being eager to attract business from your country for investments. Which are some of the potentials that, according to you, can be exploited and which are the most attractive fields?

- In addition to economic assistance, now Japanese companies are starting to be more interested in investing in Albania in the future. I hope our business relations will be strengthened and as a Japanese Ambassador I am explaining and briefing Japanese business executives about the positive business environment in Albania, currently.

Albania's advantages include the high quality workforce, being close to the European Markets,

etc. On the other hand, the most attractive fields could be manufacturing, tourism and more.

- Rule of law, democracy and people's welfare, among others, determine the success of a government, but, on top of all, it's a task. Following the functioning of the democratic system in Japan, I see that people are often called to go to polls as it happened in October, when PM Shinzo Abe won another term in office. Mr. Ambassador, how can you share your experience with Albania in these fields?

- In the recent general elections, the government of Prime Minister Abe received a greater support of the majority of the population. I think that the Abe Government will continue to conduct many domestic and diplomatic policies.

The Japanese Government strongly supports the Albanian efforts to reform including the judicial reform.

- Speaking of the new government's foreign policy, which are some of the major objectives in the region, but even worldwide?

- Currently the Japanese foreign diplomacy has three main pillars. A main pillar for the gov-

ernment of Japan is to maintain the strong political, economic and defense alliance with the United States.

Our Government also gives priority to maintaining and strengthening the friendly and peaceful relations with the neighboring countries, as well as the European Union and other European Countries.

Another priority is to strengthen the multilateral cooperation and contribution in the field of disarmament, human security and economic cooperation is also a pillar of Japan's foreign diplomacy.

- Your Excellency, your diplomatic career is in a way linked to the Balkans even before being appointed as your country's top envoy to Tirana. Given your past experience how do you assess the latest developments in the region, especially the aspiration of the regional countries to join the EU?

- It is very natural for the Balkan Countries to share their aspiration to join the European Union, to join a greater regional organization which shares common values, and resources in the field politics, economy and defense.

As a Japanese government we support these aspirations and efforts.

- Although it is not long that you are in Albania, but following your activities it is evident that you have visited a lot of the country. Which are your impressions seeing things out of the capital, meeting ordinary citizens in different parts of Albania?

- During this summer, I intensively paid a visit to local cities such as Kukës, Shkodra, Tropoja, Durres, Berat, Gjirokastra, Korça. I had the opportunity to meet mayors, cultural and economic representatives.

During these meetings, I had the opportunity to discuss our bilateral relations, while they expressed the strong interest to strengthen the cooperation with Japan, especially in the field of cultural exchanges and investments from Japanese Companies and economic cooperation.



Ambassador Ito with Albanian Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs Dërmir Bushati