

AMBASSADOR MAKOTO ITO ON OCCASION OF EMPEROR NARUHITO'S ENTHRONEMENT

# Toward Harmonious Japanese-Albanian Ties

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by Genc Miloja  
SENIOR DIPLOMATIC EDITOR



The Japanese Ambassador to Tirana, Mr Makoto Ito

"I am sure that during the new Era, our relations will be just as 'Reiwa' describes, beautiful and harmonious," has said the Japanese Ambassador to Tirana, Makoto Ito in an interview with Albanian Daily News on the occasion of the accession to the Imperial Throne of His Majesty Emperor Naruhito on May 1, 2019.

Crown prince Naruhito has become Japan's new Emperor after Emperor Emeritus Akihito was the first Japanese Emperor to accede to the Imperial Throne of Japan after the 2nd World War. Before his arrival in Albania, Ambassador Ito had an opportunity to meet with Their Majesties, and during the meeting he was impressed by their kind and warm attitude.

"On May 1st, the 'Reiwa' era has been started, following the accession to the Imperial Throne of His Majesty Emperor Naruhito. The name 'Reiwa' means beautiful harmony, and includes the meaning of 'culture coming into being and flourishing when people bring their hearts will be nurtured as people bring their hearts and minds together in a beautiful manner.' Our hope in this new era is that important national characteristics of Japan such as the ancient history, highly respectable culture, and natural beauty, will be firmly preserved during the reign of

Emperor Naruhito," said the Ambassador.

But he noted that, like previous eras, "Reiwa" will not bring a new political platform or drastic changes in the Japanese policy, although over time, the name "Reiwa" might become associated with significant domestic and national events. "Our Government's foreign policy will continue on the same path. This includes our current stance towards Europe and the Western Balkans Region. I am very happy that His Excellency President Meta will attend the official Enthronement Ceremony in October together with other foreign dignitaries in attendance. I hope that his first visit to Japan will be very successful and fruitful."

Tokyo's top diplomat to Tirana unveiled that over the last year, relations between our countries were marked by several positive developments, and in this frame he highlighted that the number of high-level exchanges increased significantly between Tokyo and Tirana.

Ambassador Ito announced that this is an exceptional time for the Japanese culture here in Tirana and mentioned some events that will take place in Albania during the interview which follows:

**Albanian Daily News:**  
Crown prince Naruhito be-

came on May 1, 2019, Japan's new Emperor, after the abdication of his father, Akihito, who becomes the country's first monarch to do so for more than two centuries. Which has been the perception of the Japanese people on these two events?

Ambassador Makoto Ito: Emperor Emeritus Akihito was the first Japanese Emperor to accede to the Imperial Throne of Japan after the 2nd World War. During his reign, he pursued peace and harmony, and was able to gain the respect and love of the people, mainly due to his support toward the citizens and our nation.

In 1947, after the 2nd World War, a new Constitution was introduced to Japan, which gave the sovereign power to the people, instead of the Emperor and established a parliamentary system. As stated in the Constitution of Japan, the Emperor is "the symbol of the State and of the unity of the people" but he does not possess political power. Despite these changes, Their Majesties have been very active, especially in providing support to the Japanese people in case of natural disasters, visiting the affected areas and expressing their solidarity to the people affected.

Before my arrival in Albania, I had an opportunity to meet with Their Majesties,

and during the meeting I was impressed by their kind and warm attitude.

**- Starting from now Japan has entered the new era name system 'Reiwa'. What does that mean for the upcoming new imperial rule? Is it just a custom of name changing or a new platform?**

- It is a tradition of my country that with a new Emperor we name a new Era. In this continuity, the previous era called "Heisei" started with the accession to the Throne of Emperor Emeritus Akihito, and the name "Heisei" means peace and prosperity, in hope that the new reign would bring peace and prosperity to the Japanese nation.

On May 1st, the "Reiwa" era has been started, following the accession to the Imperial Throne of His Majesty Emperor Naruhito. The name "Reiwa" means beautiful harmony, and includes the meaning of "culture coming into being and flourishing when people bring their hearts will be nurtured as people bring their hearts and minds together in a beautiful manner." Our hope in this new era is that important national characteristics of Japan such as the ancient history, highly respectable culture, and natural beauty, will be firmly preserved during the reign of Emperor Naruhito.

However, like previous eras, "Reiwa" will not bring a new political platform or drastic changes in the Japanese policy, although over time, the name "Reiwa" might become associated with significant domestic and national events.

**- Your Excellency, when I was in Japan on a visit in the frame of your country's cooperation initiative with Western Balkan countries, I had the opportunity to meet people who had experienced the impact of the nuclear bombs thrown on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Some blamed the then Emperor for entering the 2nd World War. According to you, has the Emperor's authority as an institution weakened?**

- As I previously mentioned in 1947, a new Constitution was introduced to Japan, which gave the sovereign power to the people, limiting the role and functions of the Emperor in the political arena. However the Emperor is "the symbol of the State and of the unity of the people" although he does not possess political power.

Despite such changes, the people of Japan feel very close to the Emperor and they respect the Imperial Family very much.

**- Mr. Ambassador, will Emperor Naruhito, consid-**

**ered as an anglophile, bring new spirit to Japan's internal and foreign approach?**

- His Majesty, Emperor Naruhito studied abroad at Merton College, at the University of Oxford, while Her Majesty, Empress Masako graduated from the Faculty of Economics of Harvard University. In addition, our Imperial Family has very old and very close ties with the British Monarchy, as well as other European Royal Families, such as Denmark, Sweden, Norway and Spain.

So both their Majesties have a very good understanding and very good relations with other foreign monarchies and foreign countries.

**- The historical event will be marked in autumn this year, as reported, by a ceremony with the participation of leaders from around the world. Beyond the protocol aspect, which is its significance in the frame of Japan's stance on regional and global worldwide affairs?**

- As I previously mentioned, "Reiwa" will not bring a new political platform or drastic changes in the Japanese policy. Our Government's foreign policy will continue on the same path. This includes our current stance towards Europe and the Western Balkans Region. I am very happy that His Excellency President Meta will attend the official Enthronement Ceremony in October together with other foreign dignitaries in attendance. I hope that his first visit to Japan will be very successful and fruitful.

**- The historical event was celebrated in Tirana in a reception hosted by You on May 2. Given this occasion what can you say on the current relations of Albania with Japan?**

- Over the last year, relations between our countries were marked by several positive developments. The number of high-level exchanges increased significantly, with the visits of Foreign Minister Bushati and Mayor Erion Veliaj to Japan and the visit of Mr. Hase, the Chairman of the Friendship Parliamentary Association to Albania.

In addition, following the launch of the "Western Bal-

kans Cooperation Initiative" by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, our Government has steadily worked towards the materialization of this initiative. In this framework, H.E Mr. Jun Saito, Ambassador for the Western Balkans visited Albania three months ago to hold a political consultation, and several JICA missions have arrived in Albania to discuss with the Albanian authorities possible areas for cooperation.

In cooperation with the Regional Youth Cooperation Office, 18 youths from the Western Balkans visited Japan. An investment promotion seminar and a disaster prevention seminar were held, and journalists and representatives from the Western Balkans were invited to Japan.

Several athletes of the Albanian Wrestling Federation visited Japan on February and trained with the Japanese Wrestling Federation, in preparation for the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games. In addition, the Secretary General of the Ministry of Education Mr. Oltjon Muzaka, and the Director of the Museum of Oriental Art "Bratko" Ms. Fjoralba Prifti paid a visit to Japan.

This is an exceptional time for the Japanese culture here in Tirana. Many events are planned to take place in the coming months, such as a Japanese Film Festival, a Noh theater performance as well as a Noh mask exhibition, a traditional Japanese drum performance and a jazz musical performance. In addition, the Embassy donated 42,119 euros to the Polytechnic University of Tirana, for the construction of a Japanese Language Laboratory.

The Embassy also signed an agreement with the Municipality of Korea to provide a grant aid of 80,004 euros for procuring 89 machines that will be utilized for the greening of this Municipality. The Embassy also signed an agreement with the Municipality of Berat to provide a grant aid of 75,000 euros for the procurement of a fire truck engine, a necessity for the protection of this UNESCO world heritage site.

I am sure that during the new Era, our relations will be just as "Reiwa" describes, beautiful and harmonious.