**２０２２年度天皇誕生日レセプション**

**奈良平大使御挨拶（正文）**

Your Excellencies, dear distinguished guests and friends of Japan,

１　Introduction

I am pleased to hold the Emperor's Birthday Reception after the hiatus following the COVID-19 pandemic.

２　Close Ties between the Imperial Family of Japan and Bulgaria

On the occasion of His Majesty the Emperor's 63rd birthday, let me introduce some aspects of the relations between the Imperial Family and Bulgaria.

The first official document, which confirms this relation , is the letter from Alexander of Battenberg, who notifies his enthronement as Prince to Emperor Meiji in 1879. There follows the audience of Prince Kuniyoshi of Kuninomiya to King Ferdinand in 1909 and the visit of Prince and Princess Takamatsu to Bulgaria in 1931.

In 1979, then Crown Prince and Princess, who are currently their Majesties the Emperor Emeritus and Empress Emerita of Japan, enjoyed the Bulgarian national dance “Horo” when they visited Bulgaria. You may see their picture here in the hall.

In 2009 Prince and Princess Akishino, who are currently their Imperial Highnesses Crown Prince and Princess, visited the country, and in 2019 President Radev attended the enthronement ceremony of His Majesty the Emperor of Japan. Thus, the Imperial Family of Japan and Bulgaria continue to maintain their close contact.

３　Economic Relations

　The development of the active economic relations between Japan and Bulgaria is based on this close bilateral relations.

There are currently about 40 Japanese companies in Bulgaria, which are engaged in a wide range of businesses such as the manufacturing of auto parts, pharmaceutical products, games, etc. Of course, Bulgaria is also traditionally famous in Japan with its yogurt and rose products, as well as with sumo wrestler Koto-oushu, but I would like to mention here several examples, which very well show the good economic relations between Japan and Bulgaria.

One of them is that Shiseido made the Bulgarian rose a trade product and thus it became very popular in Japan. Down feathers from Bulgaria are used for the manufacturing of the finest Japanese bedding.

Furthermore, a company in Bulgaria produces frozen sushi using Japanese rice and machinery, as well as fish fillet procured and processed in Europe. This is a kind of product as a result of collaboration between Japan and Europe, and it’s exported from Bulgaria to the European countries.

Bulgarian engineers develop video games at SEGA in Bulgaria, with their talent for invention and artistry. The subject of the some of the games are taken from the ancient history of this region. Such games are enjoyed by the people in many countries around the world.

 It is difficult to introduce all good examples, but we can say that in this way, the bilateral economic relations continue to develop, benefiting from the characteristics of both countries. The opening of Nidec Elesys Research and Development Centre in Bulgaria last year has encouraged many Japanese companies to set up operations in Bulgaria.

In 2025 in Osaka, Japan will host the World Expo. I strongly believe that it will be a great opportunity for Bulgaria to present many aspects of its attractive sides, both its modern and traditional ones, just as the Bulgarian yogurt was introduced at Osaka World Expo in 1970 and gained popularity in Japan afterwards.

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the launch of “Bulgaria Yogurt” by Japanese food company Meiji Holdings Cooperation in partnership with LB Bulgaricum. Expo Osaka in 1970 became a good example of a start of long-lasting cooperation between our two countries.

I hope that Bulgaria will take advantage of the second participation of Bulgaria at EXPO Osaka in 2025 as much as possible, will find its second or third or more symbols of our bilateral cooperation, following its yogurt products, and will start new projects where our two countries can continue a good and long-lasting cooperation.

４　Cultural Exchanges

In the sphere of culture, the two countries continue to have good bilateral friendly relations.

With the cooperation of Japan-related associations in Bulgaria, we have been able to introduce Japanese culture and other Japan–related events online or by other means, from our traditional culture such as Ikebana, Origami or tea ceremony, to our traditional spiritual world, which is still alive in our modern society, such as Zen and traditional Japanese gardens.

 There have been also lectures on Japanese business men and its business ideology, such as ones by CEO of Shiseido Company and others. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all related organizations for their kind cooperation.

Furthermore, as you are well aware, Bulgarian sumo wrestlers such as Koto-oshu (琴欧州) and Aoiyama（碧山）, play an active role in the Japanese traditional culture and have become widely known among the Japanese people.

In the future, we would like to be more active by promoting further the bilateral exchange in different fields and by enhancing the friendly relations between Japan and Bulgaria.

In addition to the traditional Japanese culture, we intend to develop bilateral relations in a wide range of fields, including contemporary culture and academic exchange.

５　Political relations

After the last reception on the occasion of our Emperor's Birthday in 2020, the international environment has changed significantly due to the global pandemic of the coronavirus and Russia's invasion in Ukraine. Despite such backdrops, the bilateral relationships between Japan and Bulgaria have been steadily progressing, marking three anniversaries, related to the political sphere in 2019.

The fact that Japan and Bulgaria share basic values, including democracy and the rule of law, is extremely important in the current international situation. The government of Japan highly values that Bulgaria is supporting the development of the Western Balkans, taking lead in this area. Japan is also contributing to the Western Balkan development in cooperation with Bulgaria and we will continue to do so with our colleagues in Bulgaria.

６　Japan’s message for further development of Bulgaria

Japan and Bulgaria have developed good ties in various fields, and here it would be fair to point out that this was possible also thanks to the colourful charms of Bulgaria itself.

Bulgaria has many attractive sides, such as diverse nature, ancient history and heritage, hot springs, historical music and dance, excellent agricultural products including wine.

In addition, there are young energetic people, who are trying to lead the Bulgarian society with their high technological capabilities, as it can be seen in the IT sector or the start-ups. Bulgaria with its uniqueness, is one of those countries, that has great potential to develop in the future.

I sincerely hope that such objectives as the accession to the Shengen Area, the OECD and the EURO zone, which are high priority to Bulgaria, will soon become a reality.

７　Conclusion

Last but not least, today almost marks one year since Russia’s invasion in Ukraine. We firmly condemn this act, and sincerely hope that the war will be ended as early as possible, bringing peace to many people. To this end, as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council and Chair of G7, Japan intends to play a greater role in the international community.

I would like to conclude my remarks, by wishing you all the best in your future endeavours and further development of the bilateral relations between Japan and Bulgaria. Today, we would like to offer you a wide variety of Japanese food, including sushi, wagyu beef and other Japanese dishes. I hope you enjoy all, together with various types of Japanese alcoholic drinks.

Позволете ми да завърша приветствието си, като пожелая на всички присъстващи крепко здраве и много успехи в бъдещите Ви начинания. Също така, бих искал да изразя надеждата си за бъдещо развитие и задълбочаване на двустранните отношения между Япония и България. Днес, с помощта на официалния готвач на резиденцията, сме Ви подготвили разнообразна палитра от японски ястия, която включва както суши и други традиционни блюда, така и японско говеждо месо wagyu. Надявам се да се насладите на всички тях, като не пропуснете да опитате и от японските алкохолни напитки.

Благодаря за вниманието.

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